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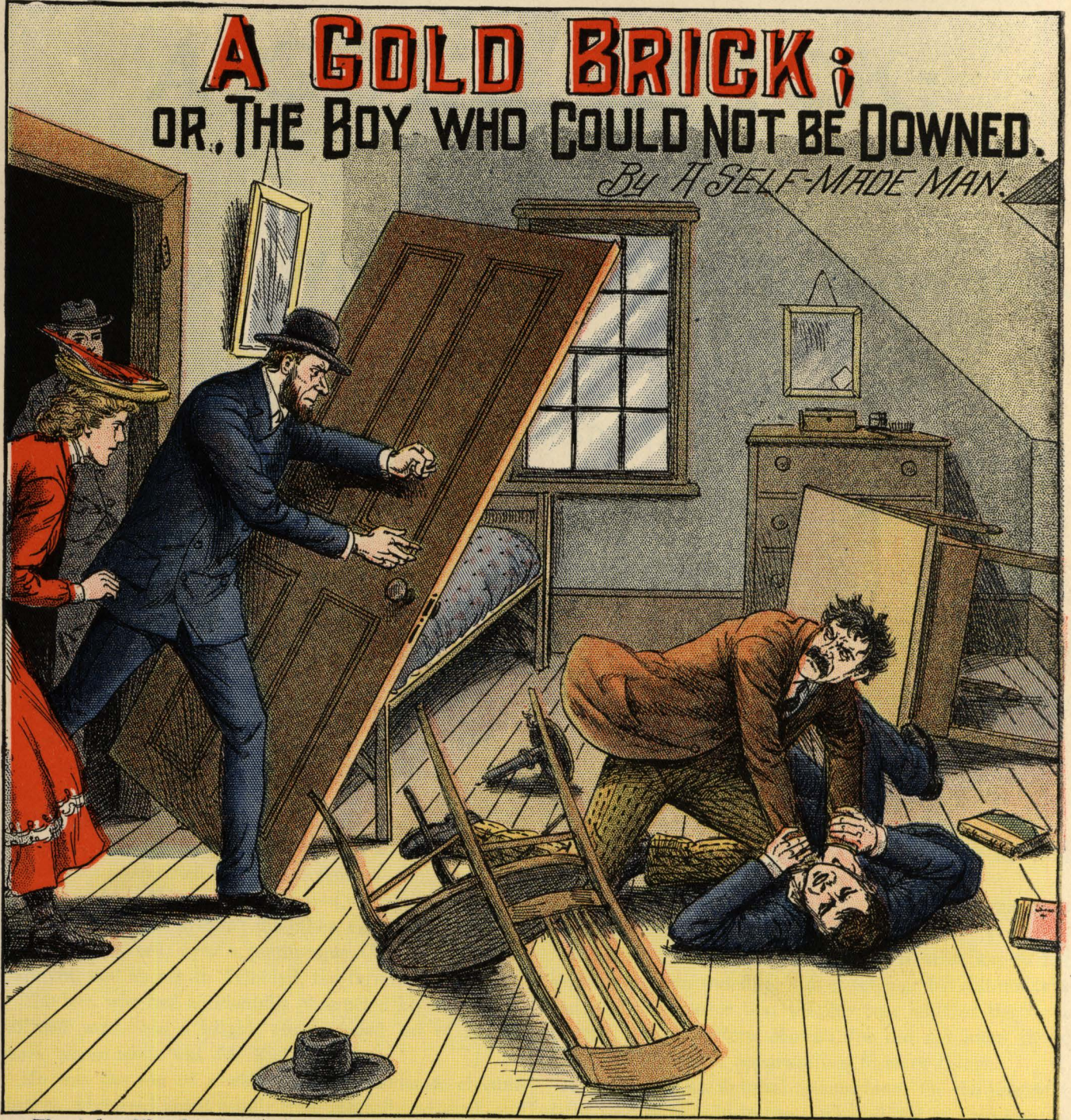
5 CENTS

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

A GOLD BRICK; OR, THE BOY WHO COULD NOT BE DOWNED.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



The talon-like fingers of the schemer closed about Joe's neck, and were fast choking the life out of the boy, when the door was suddenly burst open, and Dan Beard, closely followed by Katie Todd, dashed into the room.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1905, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 14

NEW YORK, JANUARY 5, 1906.

Price 5 Cents

A GOLD BRICK;

OR,

The Boy Who Could Not Be Downed.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES JOE VICKERS, AND SHOWS HOW HE SAVED THE LIFE OF HIS ENEMY.

"Get out of my way, boy!"

The speaker was a large and pompous-looking man.

His name was Godfrey Chase, and he was reputed to be the richest, as in his own opinion he was the most important, man in Pandora.

He was president of the Nimrod & Pandora Railroad Company, whose general offices were at Pandora.

This road consisted of two divisions—one branching northward from Pandora, via Nimrod, to Grand Junction, on the Rock Island system; the other, called the mountain division, westward, over a picturesque Colorado range to Palmyra, and thence to Trinidad, the terminal.

The boy, who had accidentally obstructed his way in the railroad yard, was a bright, curly-headed lad of sixteen years, whose name was Joe Vickers.

He was the son of a widow in very moderate circumstances, who lived about a mile from the railroad yard, and he was employed in the roundhouse as a wiper and machinist's assistant.

His father, one of the crack engineers in the company's

employ, had lost his life in an accident on the road, three years before.

Joe had been working for nearly a year at the yard, and, being an observant and ambitious youth, had become familiar with all the outward and visible parts of a locomotive, for he had plenty of opportunities to see them taken to pieces by the mechanics.

His genial manners, and willingness to make himself generally useful, had made him a favorite in the yard, especially among the machinists and wipers with whom he was brought into daily contact.

Even Gosport, the foreman, a man noted for his taciturnity, often had a pleasant word for the boy.

This might have been due to the fact that he and Joe's father had been warm friends.

While he did not seem to pay much attention to the boy, he really was watching him closely; and it did not take him long to discover that the boy was built of the right material, and, therefore, though Joe did not know it, he gave him all sorts of opportunities to learn things.

It was rather an unusual circumstance for the president of the road to be seen in the track-spanned and car-encumbered yard, but Joe, in his greasy check jumper and grimy overalls, hastened to get out of the magnate's way, and then kept right on toward the roundhouse, thinking what a fine

thing it was to be a rich man as well as the official head of a railroad company.

Entering the roundhouse, the boy walked over to one side of the building, where a big locomotive was jacked up and a machinist was waiting for the casting which was to replace the broken one lying on the ground.

Joe assisted the machinist to put the center casting in place and bolt it securely.

The engine was then let down on the track and shortly afterward was run out on the turn-table and switched to the proper track in the yard.

Another engine ran in on the table outside, some wipers swung it around and it was then backed into the house.

The foreman set Joe at work cleaning her.

In the course of his work he discovered a cracked eccentric strap and reported the fact to Mr. Gosport.

Some engineers leave the wipers to look out for breaks on the locomotives, others take a closer interest in their engines, and no wiper ever finds a broken lever, spring or hanger after them.

In due time a machinist came around and repaired the damage, but the circumstance reached the ears of Abel Hyde, the engineer of 44, who boarded not far from the yard, and he came round to see about it.

He had long prided himself on the fact that nothing ever went wrong with his locomotive that he didn't find out for himself.

He was one of the best engineers on the road, but a man with a nasty disposition, who drank a great deal, and was ready to quarrel on the slightest pretext.

"Look here," he said, coming up to Joe, who was just putting the finishing touches to 44, "what do you mean, you young monkey, by reporting a break on my engine?"

He had evidently been filling up on something stronger than water, and looked ugly and sullen.

"Because I found your eccentric strap cracked, and it was my duty to report it to the foreman," replied Joe, respectfully.

He knew the man he had to deal with and wasn't anxious for a scrap.

"You broke that yourself, you little whippersnapper!" snarled the engineer.

"You know better than that, Mr. Hyde."

"Do you mean to tell me I lie?" roared the engineer, furiously.

"No, sir, I do not," returned the boy, getting on his feet and backing out of range of the angry man's fists; "but the strap was broken all the same when the engine backed into the house."

"You're a little liar, and I'm going to take satisfaction out of your skin."

The engineer made a dash for the boy, but Joe, as nimble as a monkey on his feet, mounted into the cab at a bound and dropped down on the other side before Hyde got a footing on the tender.

When the engineer got down on the other side, Joe was just disappearing around a nearby locomotive, and all Hyde could do was to shake his fist menacingly after him.

"I'll get square with the young villain," he muttered, thickly. "I'll do him up or my name isn't Abel Hyde."

Then he staggered off to hunt up the foreman and enter a protest.

He found Gosport somewhere about the yard.

"I want that boy taken off my engine, do you understand?" he cried, angrily, laying his hand on the foreman's arm. "I won't have him do no more cleaning around 44."

"What are you talking about?" growled Gosport, shaking off the engineer's grasp.

"I'm talking about Joe Vickers, that's who I'm talking about."

"What about him?" demanded the foreman, impatiently.

"I want you to put another wiper on 44 next time she comes in. That young imp reported a broken eccentric on my engine this afternoon."

"I examined the locomotive and found that the report was correct," replied the foreman shortly, for he didn't relish such argument from Hyde, or any one else about the yard.

"Well, if you found it he done it himself somehow, and tried to sneak out of it."

"That's all nonsense, Hyde. You know the boy couldn't break that strap himself. You're always so careful with your engine it's a wonder you didn't notice it yourself."

"I say there wasn't no such thing the matter with 44 when I left the house."

"Well, I'm not going to argue the matter with you," said the foreman, turning away.

"I don't care whether you want to or not. All I want you to do is to put another wiper on my engine."

"Joe understands his business as well as any wiper in the yard."

"I say he doesn't. He's a fool, and I won't have him plugging round 44."

"You've been drinking, Hyde, and you don't know what you're talking about."

"S'posing I have been drinking? It ain't none of your blame business. Are you going to give me a new wiper, that's what I want to know?"

"No."

"All right," he snarled. "You'll be responsible if anything happens to my engine. I'll get square with that young monkey, see if I don't."

"You'd better leave him alone unless you want to have a run-in with me," said Gosport, in a hard voice. "You're all right, Hyde, when you're sober, but when you get a drink or two aboard you're uglier than sin. Go home, now, and don't let me hear you open your face on this subject again."

With that Gosport walked away, leaving the engineer glowering after him, and swearing under his breath like a trooper.

"So, Joe Vickers is a fav'rite of yours, is he?" muttered Hyde, still following the retreating form of the foreman with his coal-black eyes. "And I mustn't touch him, eh? What do you s'pose I care for you, Steve Gosport. I'll do

as I please. I'll lick that boy within an inch of his life the first chance I get."

He started to walk away, but rage and the fumes of liquor in his brain made his steps uncertain.

"Mebbe I'll find him at the roundhouse now."

He staggered against a switch and bruised his forehead so that a tiny streak of blood oozed down his forehead and alongside of his nose.

"I mustn't touch him," he snarled, maliciously. "Of course not. I won't do a thing to the cantankerous little monkey. He won't wipe my engine no more, I'll bet on that. S'posen there was a break, what right has he to report it to the foreman, when he could have come and told me. No, but he must go and show me up. I'll fix him!"

Hyde's nature was cruel and revengeful.

Drink churned up all that was bad in the man and made him blind to reason.

There was a whispered rumor afloat that he had once killed a comrade during a drunken spree in a distant part of the country, but no one could say positively that the story was true.

As a matter of course, he was not popular about the yard.

Had he not been an uncommonly skilled engineer he would long since have lost his job on the road.

Just now it suited his humor to find Joe and attack him.

He calculated on doing this in spite of the foreman's warning.

As he was approaching the roundhouse a locomotive came out of one of the doors.

He didn't know it, but Joe, the object of his attention, was only a few yards away, coming toward him from another building.

As the engine came along, Hyde started to cross the track in front of her.

His feet got in his way and he tripped over the near rail, measuring his length on the ground, between the tracks.

The fireman of the locomotive who was running her out saw Hyde go down and threw back the lever, although he realized it was too late to save the man by his efforts to stop the engine.

It would have been all up with Hyde but for Joe Vickers, whose eyes were on him when he went down.

The boy sprang forward, grasped the engineer by his jacket, and, exerting all of his strength, pulled him clear of the pilot of the oncoming locomotive just in the nick of time.

"By, George! that was a mighty close call," ejaculated the yardmaster, who happened to step out of his office at the moment, as the engine passed on. "Who is that plucky boy?"

The words were addressed to a switchman who knew the lad well.

"That's Joe Vickers, one of the wipers at the roundhouse."

CHAPTER II.

KATIE TODD AND TROUBLE.

Probably a dozen persons in the immediate vicinity witnessed the rescue, and several came running up to find out if Hyde had actually escaped scot free.

Joe assisted the man to his feet, and the thanks he got, as soon as Hyde recognized him, was a severe clout alongside of the head.

"What did you do that for?" cried the boy, indignantly.

"It ain't half what I'm going to do to you in about three shakes of a lamb's tail," snarled the ungrateful engineer.

"Here, what in thunder are you up to, Hyde?" shouted one of the yard hands, seizing him by the arm. "Don't you know that boy saved your life just now?"

"Saved nothing!" yelled the engineer. "I came over here to lick him, and I'm going to do it!"

"I guess not," replied the yardman, "unless you want to have a mix-up with me. What kind of man are you, anyway?"

"Mind your own business, will you?" snarled Hyde.

"Well, this is my business. Besides, the yardmaster is looking at you, and you had better sneak, quick."

"Shut up!"

"You're drunk, that's what's the matter with you," said the yardman, in a tone of disgust.

"That's my affair."

"What's the trouble?" asked Mr. Radway, the yardmaster, coming up.

"Nothing, sir," replied the yardman, not wishing to get the engineer in trouble.

"I saw him strike young Vickers, after the boy had pulled him off the track from in front of 66," persisted Mr. Radway, who was a man with a sharp eye and not easily hoodwinked.

"Didn't know what he was doing, I guess, sir."

"What are you doing here anyway, Hyde?" asked the yardmaster suspiciously. "You're off duty."

He saw that the engineer was under the influence of liquor.

Hyde growled out something under his breath and started to walk away.

After watching the engineer a moment, the yardmaster turned to Joe.

"That was a nervy act, young man, and I'm obliged to you for saving me the trouble of having to report a fatal accident in the yard. Why did he strike?"

"I think he wasn't aware of what he was doing, sir," said the boy generously.

"Maybe so," replied Mr. Radway, apparently satisfied. "The man is very drunk."

He knew Hyde's failing, but as the engineer always turned up in proper condition to take his engine out, he didn't feel called upon to notice it.

So he returned to his office.

"What's the trouble between you and Hyde?" asked the yardman of Joe.

The boy explained the origin of Hyde's ugliness in the roundhouse.

"You were in the right, of course," said the other. "All the same you want to keep your eye skinned for Hyde. He's meaner than dirt, and as dangerous as a snake. Like as not he'll try to get at you in the dark—hit you from behind. Just watch out that he doesn't turn the trick on you. He's capable of doing you a bodily injury as not."

"I'll be on my guard against him. Any man, even half drunk as he is, that would turn on a fellow after he has saved his life, is pretty low down."

"That's right," agreed the yardman, and then the group broke up.

Joe left the yard about six o'clock for home.

A block away he passed a paper box factory.

Thirty or forty girls worked there and most of them were flocking out at that hour.

Among them was a pretty little miss with blonde hair and a creamy complexion.

This was Katie Todd, who lived nearly opposite Joe's home.

She and the young wiper were great friends, and she usually went home with him nights.

Her home surroundings were not of the best.

Her father was a lazy, intemperate man, who beat his wife when the humor was on him, and didn't spare the girl, either.

Mrs. Todd did odd jobs of washing for people in the neighborhood, but the support of the family largely depended on Katie herself.

There were two smaller children who went to school.

Once in a while Michael Todd, the father, would take a notion to go to work, but he seldom turned any of his wages into the house.

He was an experienced section foreman and the railroad company would have kept him continuously employed if he cared to be industrious.

But he didn't.

He preferred to hang around the same saloon where Hyde got his liquor, and the two were sort of boon companions in their cups.

"Good evening, Katie," said Joe in his cheerful, breezy way.

"Good evening, Joe. I've been waiting for you."

"Not long, I hope."

"No, only a moment or two."

"Can't we go with you, too, Joe?" asked another girl with a laugh, advancing with a companion.

"Sure thing," grinned the boy. "The more the merrier."

"That's real nice of you. I didn't know but you wanted Katie all to yourself."

"The idea!" laughed Katie. "Just as if he would."

The four walked up the street together, chatting and laughing merrily.

As they started to cross one of the streets an automobile came around the corner with a rush.

It happened to be a close shave for the party, and the girls screamed and sprang back, Katie slipping down.

A boy of sixteen was driving the machine, and he looked around and laughed heartily, as if he thought the affair a huge joke.

"That was Herbert Chase, the son of the president of the railroad," said Joe, as he assisted the frightened Katie on her feet and brushed off her dress.

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," cried the girl indignantly. "He might have run over us, especially me."

"That's what he ought," exclaimed one of the other girls angrily. "I don't think I ever had such a fright in my life."

"He's very reckless, I must say," admitted Joe, who privately thought Herbert had done the act on purpose just to scare them.

It was very like him at any rate.

He was a spoiled boy, and was accustomed to do pretty much as he pleased.

He knew Joe well by sight, and had even spoken to him in an insulting way on several occasions when he chanced to meet him.

He despised the engine wiper because the boy was poor and was forced to work at a dirty business to support his mother.

In fact Herbert had no use for anybody who didn't move in the same grade of society as himself.

"Say, Joe," asked the girl who had just spoken, "why are those numbers put on that auto—210?"

"You mean those figures swinging from the rear axle?"

"Yes."

"That's Herbert's score," replied Joe with a grin.

"What do you mean by that?"

"It shows how many persons he's run over or frightened up to this time. He'll add us four to that to-night when he puts his machine away."

"Does it really?"

"Don't you believe that, Maggie," cried Katie, who was better informed on the subject. "Joe is fooling you. That's the registered number of that machine. It's always the same."

"Aren't you mean!" cried Maggie, giving the boy a playful slap on the arm.

At the next corner Joe and Katie parted from Miss Maggie and her friend.

"There's father," said Katie suddenly, with a little start of apprehension, for her quick eye noticed that Michael Todd was a little unsteady on his legs, and this fact promised unfortunate results at home.

"I see him," observed Joe.

"He's been drinking I'm afraid," fluttered from the girl's lips.

"That's evident," admitted the boy. "It's too bad that a strong and hearty man like he is will throw away opportunities to better his condition."

"I hope he won't see us," said the factory girl tremulously.

But as it happened the section foreman was not so drunk but he readily noticed what was going on about him, and his eyes soon lighted on his daughter and the young engine wiper.

The sight seemed to arouse a sudden anger in him and he hastened his steps.

This wasn't the first time by any means that he had seen Joe and Katie together, and their companionship had heretofore never aroused any opposition on his part.

Their friendship appeared to be a matter of indifference to him.

When sober he had been civil to Joe, when intoxicated, surly; but he had never interfered.

Now, however, a change had suddenly come over his views.

Hyde and he had been drinking together since the engineer left the yard after his failure to inflict chastisement on the lad, and Hyde had prejudiced him against young Vickers.

Michael Todd now felt an unexplainable resentment against the boy, and it only needed a very slight pretext to show itself.

That pretext was supplied when he saw Joe coming down the street with his daughter.

He walked up and stopped before them, barring their progress.

His bloodshot eyes snapped and his whole attitude was menacing and threatened trouble.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH REFERENCE IS MADE TO THE GOLD BRICK.

"You go home, gal!" he cried to Katie, catching her by the arm.

"We're going home, father," replied the girl in trembling tones.

"Well, go then," swinging her roughly aside. "Go, d'ye hear?"

Katie heard and meekly obeyed.

She knew well enough that in his present humor he would have struck her down on the walk had she made the slightest opposition.

"Now ye kin go yer way," he said, turning to Joe.

"This happens to be my way," replied the boy quietly.

"No it ain't. At any rate ye don't live on this side of the street—ye live on the other."

"Well, what if I do?" answered Joe, indignant at the man's nasty manner. "I can walk up this side if I choose, can't I?"

"Not with my darter, ye can't," snarled Michael Todd with a vindictive look.

"This isn't the first time I've done it, and I never heard you object before," protested the young railroad employe.

"I know it ain't the first time, but it's goin' to be the last, d'ye understand. I don't want ye hangin' 'round arter her any more."

"What's the reason of this sudden——"

"It ain't none of yer bizness what the reason is, or how sudden it is. I won't have ye walkin' with Katie, and that's all there is to it."

"It's a small thing to make a kick about," objected Joe, who didn't relish the idea of being cut off entirely from the society of the pretty Miss Todd.

"Look here, Joe Vickers, I don't want any back sass from ye, and what's more I won't take it. Ye're a little too swift for yer circumstances. P'haps ye think ye kin rub it into my friend, Hyde, but I reckon when he gets a good chance at ye ag'in he'll make ye sorry yer alive."

"I understand now why you've taken this unaccountable dislike to me," replied Joe, coldly. "Mr. Hyde has been running me down to you."

"I guess he ain't said no more'n ye deserve."

"I'll bet he didn't tell you how I saved him from being run down by an engine in the yard this afternoon."

For a moment Michael Todd opened his eyes very wide, for this was news to him; but the intelligence didn't seem to affect him very much.

"I guess ye're dreamin'," he answered incredulously. "He didn't say nothin' to me about it."

"That's what I thought. Well, I'm going home."

"Go; and if I hetch ye with Katie ag'in there's goin' to be trouble."

Joe made no further remark, but passed on, leaving Michael Todd standing in the middle of the sidewalk, swaying lightly to and fro, but following the boy with his eyes.

As for himself the lad didn't care a rap for the section foreman or his command to keep away from Katie; but for all that he realized that it would be well that their intimacy should be cut down for the girl's sake, since Michael Todd would vent his displeasure on his daughter, and that, too, in a way that wouldn't be pleasant to her.

"This is Hyde's doings," he muttered as he went along. "He's an ungrateful beast. He'll make it a point to injure me all he can after this. It's a pity such fellows as he should be allowed at large. Their proper place is the penitentiary, and I've no doubt but he'll get there yet."

A few minutes later he reached his mother's cottage.

"You're late, Joe, to-night. Supper has been ready for a quarter of an hour."

"Never mind, mother," he said, kissing her with filial warmth. "I'm hungry enough to eat my share in half the usual time."

"You always have a good appetite, my boy," replied his mother with a cheerful smile. "That is a blessing denied to many."

"Hard work and plenty of it is bound to give a fellow an appetite," replied Joe cheerfully. "But here's something that ought to give one an appetite if anything will," and the boy produced a small pocketbook and took an oblong slip of paper from it.

"What is that, my son?" asked the little mother curiously.

"That," said Joe, with a broad grin, "is the result of a little stirring up of my gray matter," and the boy tapped his forehead proudly.

"I don't quite understand you, Joe," Mrs. Vickers said, somewhat mystified.

"I have kept it as a secret until now, mother," went on the boy, "as I wanted to surprise you."

"Well," said his mother expectantly.

"What does this paper look like?"

"It might be a receipt," said Mrs. Vickers, who saw only the back of it.

"That's true, mother, it might be, but it isn't. It happens to be a check."

"A check? Money?" exclaimed the little woman in wonder.

"Exactly. It represents money."

"That's something that is always welcome. How much is it, and how did you manage to earn it?"

"I'll bet you couldn't guess the amount, mother," he said mischievously.

"No, I haven't the least idea. Is it ten dollars?"

"If you had said fifty times ten you would have come closer to it."

"Now Joe, that is simply ridiculous."

"Is it? Then cast your eye upon it, mother, dear, and you will see that the First National Bank of Pandora is requested to pay to the order of Joseph Vickers, that's yours truly, the sum of five hundred dollars. Signed, Harper Fosdick."

Mrs. Vickers flopped down in a convenient chair and stared at her son in sheer amazement.

"What does it all mean?" she gasped.

"It means, mother, that I've figured out a new idea in automatic car couplers. I had no money to patent it, and I knew you could not afford to help me, so I hunted around till I found a man who had some money, and whom I believed I could trust, and to him I explained the advantages of my idea, and he has purchased a half interest in the invention for \$500. He will have it patented, and when it shall have been introduced on the market we will divide the royalties between us."

"What a head you've got, Joe! And what are you going to do with all that money?"

"I think you could find use for it, couldn't you?"

"I can get along very well with your regular wages, my son. You had better put that \$500 in the bank for your own."

"No, mother, \$500 would do you more good than it would me. I am going to make a deal with you. I will give you this check for that 'gold brick' you have in the bureau drawer."

"Gold brick! I don't understand what you mean?" replied Mrs. Vickers in a perplexed tone.

"Don't you? Well, I mean that deed to a certain plot of land located somewhere out in the wilderness, which father was persuaded to accept from Mr. Godfrey Chase more than ten years ago in full satisfaction for the sum of \$2,500 which father had loaned him some months previously."

"Why, Joe, that isn't worth anything like \$500. Besides you know I couldn't transfer that property to you as you're a minor."

"You needn't transfer it to me until I reach the age of 21. I can trust you to hold it for me that long, can't I?"

"But why are you so eager to give me \$500 for that property? You know I've tried many times to sell it, and the best offer I could get was \$100, and then the gentleman who made that offer said he wasn't sure it was worth while even as a speculation of the future."

"Well, mother, I'm buying it from you chiefly to make you a present of this \$500 check. As I'm satisfied, I think you ought to be. Is it a bargain?"

"Of course, if you will have it that way."

"All right, mother, here is the money," and he handed her the check. "I now consider the property mine. You have realized something out of it after all. It was an outrageous swindle on Mr. Chase's part to work that property off on father."

"It was, indeed," sighed Mrs. Vickers. "Mr. Chase was in very moderate circumstances in those days, and he was very glad to borrow \$2,500 from your father so he could pay for the house he was putting up. When the note became due Mr. Chase was unable to pay cash, and to save his credit he offered that land, which he represented to be worth more than \$3,500. Of course before your father accepted the land he made an investigation as to its value. As it afterward turned out, the person to whom he applied for trustworthy information was an intimate associate of Mr. Chase. On the strength of this person's report, which was most favorable, your father accepted the property and in return cancelled the note. Too late we discovered that the property had little real value."

"It seems to me, mother, that the scales of justice often tip the wrong way. Mr. Chase worked this gold brick off on father, yet to-day he is a wealthy man and president of the railway in whose employ father lost his life, while we, who suffered at his hands, are comparatively poor, and dependent on the small salary I draw from the same company. That isn't right."

"No, it doesn't seem so," admitted Mrs. Vickers, sadly.

"When father found how he had been taken in didn't he make a kick with Mr. Chase over it?"

"Yes, they had some words on the subject. Mr. Chase had inherited a legacy which he invested in stock of the railroad company and had just been elected president of the road. He refused, however, to recompense your father for his loss. All he did was to get him a special increase of salary as engineer of the day express, and this, of course, did not come out of his pocket."

"That was no favor," answered the boy. "Father had to earn every dollar he received from the company. He was one of the best engineers on the road."

"So I have always understood, yet when he received the injury which resulted in his death, the company refused to assume any responsibility, on the ground that the accident was the result of carelessness on your poor father's part."

"Mother, you know it was the fault of an old engine. You ought to have brought suit against the company for damages."

"I had little money to spare for such a thing. The only

two witnesses I could have depended on disappeared. I had no friends possessed of influence enough to bring the company to terms, and so I had to be content with Mr. Chase's proposal, which he said was entirely a voluntary one on the part of the company, and accepted a sum of money just large enough to cover the expenses of the funeral."

"Another gold brick, mother. It was an outrage. Had I been old enough I never would have consented to such a swindle."

"It is too late now to worry over the matter. We should be thankful that this cottage is almost wholly our own, and that we both have our health and strength. We are not so poor as many of our neighbors."

"That is true, mother. I am sorry that the mortgage on this cottage is held by Mr. Chase."

"I don't know as it makes much difference who holds it—it has got to be paid."

"But a man, even if he be rich and powerful in his way, who would swindle an obliging friend out of the value of a just debt, and afterward defraud his widow of her just rights, is not a person to be trusted. I hope he hasn't another gold brick up his sleeve."

"I'm sure he couldn't think of harming us," replied Mrs. Vickers, regarding her son with some surprise.

"I am afraid, mother, there is a slight difference of opinion between us on that subject."

Then he told her how rudely he had been addressed in the railroad yard that afternoon by the magnate.

"He treated me as if I were the dirt under his feet, though I am sure he recognized me. He might have accorded me the common politeness due even an humble employe. And it is the same way with his son Herbert. He seems to take an especial delight in noticing me, only to insult me."

"I am sorry to hear that," replied Mrs. Vickers in a pained tone. "When you and Herbert were very little boys you were great friends and always played together."

"I know it, mother. But that was when Godfrey Chase was comparatively poor himself, and my father was his equal in every respect. Now things are different. Herbert goes to the High School while I am only an engine wiper on the N. & P., of which road his father is the most important figure."

"It's the way of the world, my son, and we must bow to the inevitable."

"Well, I'm not kicking. I wouldn't change places with Herbert Chase for all his prospects. Some day I hope to be as important as his father. Who knows?"

"I hope so," said Mrs. Vickers, with a proud glance at her stalwart and handsome son.

"The only thing I'm really sorry for is that I haven't got the same educational advantages as Herbert Chase. As for the rest, any boy with good health and ambition can make his way upward. I heard the minister say last Sunday evening that this country offered boundless opportunities for success to the American boy who possessed the backbone and energy to grasp out for and make the most

of his chances, and I am sure he was right. He also said that the success which came to many of our foremost men was due in a large measure to their having had good mothers, and I know I have one of the best mothers in the world."

With those words Joe got up and kissed his mother good-night, while Mrs. Vickers, with tears in her eyes, thanked God for having blessed her with such a brave and noble-minded son.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH JOE GETS A REGULAR JOB AS FIREMAN ON THE FREIGHT.

Next morning Joe was coming out of the roundhouse when he was accosted by the foreman.

"Here, Vickers, I want you to go over and fire 21. We're short of firemen in the yard this morning. You'll find her yonder."

"All right, sir," answered the boy, hastening to obey orders.

He was delighted at the opportunity thus presented to learn the ropes of a fireman's job, as it was a step on the road to his present ambition—to become a locomotive engineer.

Engine 21 was used for switching purposes.

Joe found that the regular fireman had been suddenly taken ill, and there being no available man on hand, the foreman, as was usual in such a case, picked out a wiper to fill in the emergency, and his friendship for the boy induced him to give Vickers the chance.

So Joe swung up into the cab, where the engineer, one Gautier, was waiting for him.

It was not the first time he had been on an engine.

He had often had opportunities to ride about the yard, and on such occasions had carefully watched the work of both fireman and engineer with the view to future profit, for he knew the time would come when he would be called upon to fill the former's job, though it might be but temporarily, and upon his expertness would probably depend his chance of becoming a regular fireman.

It was the policy of the road to advance its men as they were found deserving.

An engine wiper had a chance to become a fireman, and a fireman in time, if he was qualified, an engineer.

Some of the prominent officials of the road had risen from humble positions.

Thus every man on the road believed he stood in the line of promotion.

And this fact was an incentive to faithful work.

Joe had resolved to make good when the chance came his way, and fortune always seems to favor those who are determined to win.

Gautier received the signal to go ahead, and glancing at the gauge told the boy to ring the bell.

Joe pulled the bell-rope.

Ding dong! Ding dong!

The engineer pulled on the throttle a little and let off the brake.

No. 21 began to move, dragging half a dozen loaded freight cars in its wake.

"Keep the gauge about where she is now," said Gautier to his new fireman.

Joe nodded and kept his eye peeled.

When the steam began to drop a little he slammed open the furnace door, seized the shovel, and with a dextrous twist of the wrist scattered the coal over the glowing mass within.

Though this was the first shovelful of coal he had ever flung into a locomotive furnace, he was careful to imitate the method employed by the regular firemen, which was to distribute the coal evenly about, and not all in one place, which would have deadened the fire.

Gautier, who knew the boy was inexperienced, watched him with an approving nod.

"I see you've got the knack, my lad. Is this the first time you've fired?"

"Yes, sir," replied Joe respectfully, pleased with the engineer's approval.

"How did you pick up the correct method?"

"Simply by watching other firemen and taking note of how they worked."

"Smart boy. You'll come out all right, I'll bet."

"I mean to do my best to get there, sir."

"That's the most that can be expected of any one. Stick to that principle, Vickers, and some day you'll acquire the same skill your father had."

"I hope so. All I ask is the chance to learn, and then the opportunity to put my knowledge to the test."

For an hour or two the switch engine was busy pushing and hauling cars about the yard, and hauling them from one track to another.

Joe's time was principally employed in ringing the bell and keeping steam up to the proper point.

During dinner hour the boy sat in the cab and talked to Gautier while the two ate their meal out of their tin cans.

The engineer showed some interest in the young fellow, and gave him many valuable hints, while he puffed away at his pipe.

"You've got the theory of running an engine down fine, Vickers, but what you need now is the practice."

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and both were ready to resume work.

Just then he got the signal to switch to another track and run down to the extreme end of the yard for a solitary car.

He opened up a bit, then reversed her, and 21 started backward down the track.

As soon as they had hitched on to the car he said to Joe:

"Now, then, see if you can run her up to yonder switch."

Thus speaking he stepped away and gave up the lever to his new fireman.

Joe felt decidedly nervous as he touched the throttle and felt the machine start ahead.

The sensation was a peculiar one—a sort of stage fright.

By the time they reached the switch, however, he was beginning to recover his nerve.

"Reverse her," said Gautier, who was ringing the bell with one eye on the boy.

For a moment Joe was all up in the air, in spite of the fact that he knew exactly how the engine ought to be handled.

His hand was on the brake, then he recollected himself and grasped the reverse lever and moved it over and the locomotive answered like a boat to its helm.

Several times that afternoon the engineer gave him chances to get familiar with the practical working of the engine, correcting him in a kindly way when he made a blunder, so that on the whole he made considerable headway, and, toward the end, became quite cool and confident.

"You'll do all right," nodded the engineer, after they returned to the roundhouse for the day. "Evidently you have used your eyes and ears to good advantage since you came to the yard. You know more about a locomotive than most experienced firemen, and with practice you'll soon be able to run one without making mistakes."

Joe expected to resume work as a wiper again next morning, but Gautier's fireman was too ill to show up at the yard, so he was put on 21 again that day.

And the boy took advantage of every minute he was in the cab to familiarize himself with the new job, as well as to pick up any fresh kinks shown to him by the engineer.

For the next two days Joe fired the switch engine and they went back to the roundhouse once more.

Somehow or another his old work of cleaning locomotives seemed irksome to him.

He longed to be back in the cab with Gautier or some other engineer.

During the following week he got another chance on a switch engine for a day.

In fact he got several chances during the month, which struck him as a favorable sign.

And so it was.

The foreman had kept tab on his work and found that he had proved himself capable and satisfactory to the various engineers with whom he had been assigned.

The result was that one warm June evening Gosport came to him as he was about leaving off work for the day and said:

"Mr. Ditchett wishes to see you in his office right away, Vickers."

"All right, sir," replied Joe, wondering what the master mechanic wanted with him.

He hastened to that official's office, entered and gave his name to an attendant.

He was requested to walk into an inner room, where Mr. Ditchett sat at his desk.

The master mechanic looked his young visitor over critically before he spoke.

"How long have you been a wiper on this road, Vickers?"

"Eleven months, sir," answered the boy respectfully.

"How old are you?"

"Nearly seventeen, sir."

The official pursed his lips and again looked the manly young fellow over as he stood in front of him, hat in hand.

"You have been recommended to me as a competent man for a regular job as fireman. What opportunities have you had for firing?"

Joe detailed his experience about the yard.

"Hum! What do you know about an engine?"

The boy modestly explained his knowledge on the subject.

"So you think you can run one, after a fashion, do you?"

Joe intimated that Mr. Gautier said he only needed practice to be able to make good.

The master mechanic asked the boy a score of questions about the different parts of a locomotive, and about handling one, all of which Joe answered correctly.

"You didn't pick all that information up about the yard, did you?" asked Mr. Dichett curiously.

"No, sir; I've been studying a book on locomotive engineering."

"Hum! What you want to study now is the engine and let your book alone. Your father was an engineer on this road, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"You seem to know a good deal about engineering for one so young. Well, I'm going to give you a trial as a regular fireman. If you make good you'll hold the job. You'll go out to-night on 13 with the nine o'clock freight. Report at the roundhouse in time to get your engine ready for the trip. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Joe, almost dazed at his promotion to the outgoing freight.

"That is all," said the master mechanic wheeling around in his chair as a signal that the interview was at an end.

CHAPTER V.

THE 13TH OF JUNE.

"What's the matter, Joe?" asked Mrs. Vickers, noticing something strange in her son's manner as he sat down to supper that night.

"Nothing, mother, only I've been promoted."

"Promoted!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. I'm a fireman now. I make my first trip to-night. I go out with the nine o'clock freight."

"To-night!"

"Yes, mother."

"Over the mountain"

"Yes, mother, the run will take me as far as Trinidad."

"And when will you be back?" said the little mother, who to say the truth, though delighted at her boy's advancement, was not happy at the idea of his night's trip over the wild and lonesome reaches of the Colorado mountain range.

"Thursday morning."

Joe answered her questions readily enough, for he was

familiar with the schedules of the more important freight and passenger trains.

Mother and son had a long talk together before the boy finally put his hat on and left the house.

Joe arrived at the roundhouse in ample time to get his engine ready before the engineer appeared.

It wanted a quarter of nine when a tall, thin man, with a saturnine cast of countenance, appeared and climbed into the cab.

This was Gregson, the engineer, who had just returned to the employ of the Nimrod & Pandora Company after an absence of three years.

He gave Joe a searching glance, but said nothing.

In due time Gregson got the signal to run out.

He glanced at the gauge and then looked to see that everything was in place.

The locomotive glided out of the roundhouse on to the turntable and was switched to the proper track.

Then the engineer reversed her and she backed down the yard and was coupled to a long train of freight cars waiting under the shed in the gloom.

A few moment later a swinging lantern signalled Gregson to go ahead.

The steam began to hiss into the cylinders, the ponderous wheels commenced to turn, and, with Joe looking out of the left hand window of the cab and pulling the bell-rope with his right hand, the train moved slowly out of the yard.

It was a new sensation to the boy, and we are bound to say he thoroughly enjoyed it.

The train curved the suburbs of Pandora at a slow pace, Joe keeping the bell on the swing.

It was a bright moonlight night, and trees and houses near the track threw their dark shadows athwart the rails.

Then the outskirts of the town were left behind and the train entered upon a long level stretch of farming land, fenced in on both sides of the track, except when an occasional road, with its big white warning sign indicating a railroad crossing, stretched away on either side like a winding ribbon of dull yellow.

"You're a new fireman, aren't you?" asked the engineer at last, when the train had reached a speed of about fifteen miles an hour.

"Yes, sir, answered Joe, with a glance at the gauge.

"First trip, I s'pose."

The boy nodded, then banged open the furnace door and applied himself to the work of distributing several shovels full of coal inside.

"What's your name?"

"Joe Vickers."

The man started as if he had been stung.

"Are you the son of Robert Vickers, who was killed in an accident at Black Rock siding?" he asked, after a moment or two in a changed voice.

"Yes, sir."

The engineer looked out of the window and didn't speak again for several minutes.

"You heard how the wreck was caused, I s'pose," said Gregson, glaring at the lad in a strange way.

"By an engine which should have been in the repair shop," said Joe, with a trace of resentment in his voice. "It jumped the track at the switch on the down grade at high speed, tore the sides out of a dozen freight cars on the siding, piled the mail car on top of the tender, and telescoped two of the coaches behind. There were thirty people killed and injured, and the company laid the blame of it all on my father," added the boy with a stifled sob. "He died a few hours after the accident, so he could not defend himself against the charge."

"I s'pose your mother got damages?"

"Not a cent," replied Joe indignantly. "Though it is true Mr. Chase, the president, presented her with a sum sufficient to settle the undertaker's bill."

At this point Joe shoveled in more coal as the engine took the grade which swung around the foothills of the great mountain range which rose before them in a succession of tree and shrub-covered elevations that finally reached up to the snow line.

The speed of the train was now much reduced, the engine snorting away like an overworked animal.

All the locomotives on this division were powerful machines, made necessary by the heavy grades they had to overcome.

The level, productive farming country was now left behind and the wild and lonesome mountain region succeeded.

Gloomy defiles and gorges, haunted by weird shadows, with here and there a rushing mountain torrent foaming through a bridge of arched masonry, or spanned by a short steel girder.

At different points along the line there were long sidings, at one of which they passed an eastbound freight which was waiting there for them.

Black Rock siding, where Joe's father had met his death, was about midway up the mountains—at the foot of the heaviest grade on the line.

Here the train would have to wait for the night express, due a few minutes after midnight, to pass.

Many ghastly memories clung about the spot, for several accidents had happened there since the road was built.

It was peculiarly lonesome and ghostly at night, especially when the wind moaned through the pass beyond and the moonlight sifting through the pines painted fantastic shadows upon the ground.

"I guess you haven't been working on the road for some years, have you?" asked Joe, after Gregson had blown the whistle for a mountain crossing they were approaching. "I know I haven't seen you before, and I've been nearly a year in the yards."

"No," replied the man shortly, his face working curiously.

"You knew my father, did you?"

"Yes," cried the man in a hoarse voice, so strangely altered that Joe looked at him in wonder.

His hand shook where his fingers clung to the throttle, and an ashy grayness hung about his mouth.

The train passed the crossing and plunged into a narrow defile, the sides of which rose hundreds of feet straight up into the air.

When Joe opened the furnace door the red glow reflected a weird radiance above and behind the engine, and his moving figure, as he shoveled in the coal, looked gigantic and distorted upon the rocky walls of the pass.

Black Rock siding was but a short distance ahead.

Every moment Gregson grew more nervous and strange in his actions.

"What can be the matter with him?" wondered Joe, watching the man out of the corner of his eye.

"Boy!" he cried, suddenly turning and facing Joe with a look of horror almost in his eyes. "What day is this?"

"Tuesday," answered the young fireman.

"I know that," exclaimed the engineer fiercely. "I mean what day of the month?"

"The 13th of June."

"My heaven!" gasped the man with a groan. "The 13th of June! The anniversary of his death! And this is 13, my old engine, which pulled the ill-fated eastbound freight across the mountains that day. Is there a fate in this? Three years I have been away, three years during which I have suffered the pangs of the tortured. I never meant to return. Why did I? What infernal influence has compelled me to return to this road and ask for my old job again? And in this month of the year of all others! Why was I taken on and put to work to-night, the 13th? Why?" he fairly shrieked, with an insane glare at the startled boy. "Why, if it isn't my fate to pay the penalty for my——. Boy! Why do you look at me like that? You have his eyes! Aye, his very features. Are you here to accuse me of his death?"

Gregson fairly frothed at the mouth.

"What is he talking about? Is he going crazy?" gasped Joe.

"How came you on this engine, boy?"

"I was assigned to her by Mr. Ditchett."

"When?"

"At six o'clock to-night."

"And I got her at half-past eight," muttered Gregson.

His hand mechanically reached for the whistle rod, and a shrill, prolonged blast awoke the echoes of the mountain-sides.

Black Rock siding was just ahead.

"Boy," cried Gregson, turning again on the lad, with an awful look in his eyes, "this day three years ago your father lost his life at Black Rock siding yonder, owing to the defective working of the west switch. Who was responsible for the condition of that switch? Who was responsible for the condition of that switch? I was; I, Bill Gregson! I fixed the switch so 36, driven by your father, would jump the rails at that point. Why did I do it? Because I hated him. I had hated him for years, and was only waiting for my chance to do him up. He stole the only woman I ever cared for away from me, and the day they were married

I swore to kill him. And I kept my word—ha, ha, ha! If others lost their lives at the same time I could not help it—I did not care. And now this night your father will have his revenge on me. He brought me here that I might die on the same spot where he died. I know it! I feel it here!” and the engineer thumped his forehead. “I have seen him often, and he told me I should come back here to die. And I have come. I could not help myself. And on the anniversary of his death, too. But I will not go alone. No, no! You, his son, shall go with me. Thus I will cheat him of his revenge. He may kill me, but he shall also kill you, too.”

“Great Scott!” muttered the boy. “He is as mad as a March hare. Thank heaven! we are near the siding.”

Through the gloom the unnerved boy could see the flicker of the switchman’s lantern approaching the switch.

Gregson muttered incoherently a moment or two, and then as the far-away screech of the night express, as the train passed the summit and started down grade toward Black Rock siding, struck upon their ears, the man uttered a hoarse, maniacal laugh which curdled Joe’s blood.

His hand went to the throttle and he shut off steam and applied the brake.

Something instantly told the boy that this was wrong.

The freight train would certainly be brought to a standstill on the main line close by the switch, and the track was only a single one over the mountains.

What then could the engineer mean by his action?

Joe was not kept long in doubt as to Gregson’s intentions.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE ENGINE CAB.

As the speed of the freight gradually slackened, the engineer faced the boy with a smile of horrible meaning on his distorted face.

“Now, boy,” he said, with hoarse intensity, “in less than five minutes we die—you and I.”

“What do you mean?” faltered Joe.

“What do I mean? Ha, ha, ha! Haven’t I told you? Yonder comes your father. He is driving the eastbound mountain express to-night. He has ordered me to come to a stop on the main track at Black Rock siding, so that he may kill me as I killed him three years ago. I have got to do it, for I have no power to save myself. But I am going to trick him all the same. You, his son, sent to fire for me, shall share my fate. You shall die, too. We go together, so that when I meet him face to face beyond the grave I can laugh at him, and jibe at him, and——”

“Are you mad?” cried Joe. “Pull the train into the siding or you will wreck not only the freight but the express also.”

“Ha, ha, ha! You say it well—it will be a beautiful wreck,” cried the crazy man, rubbing his grimy hands together. “The cars will pile up one on top of the other and then go whirling down the mountainside—down there, boy, 1,000 feet to the river. It will be the greatest wreck of the year! Yes, yes, and you and I will be in it.”

At that terrible moment a long, wailing shriek came

floating down to them as the express, running at a 50-mile an hour clip, passed a crossing a few miles away.

“She will be here in three minutes more,” laughed the maniac discordantly. “Three minutes! And then—Ha, ha, ha!”

The distant whistle awoke Joe to the terrible reality of the situation.

There was only just time for the freight to run on to the siding before the express would be there.

The train had almost come to a standstill.

Their position was one of awful menace, not only to themselves, but to the night express as well.

“The man is stark, staring mad,” said Joe to himself. “I must act myself.”

He slipped around Gregson, who made no effort to stop him, and reached for the throttle.

The moment, however, the mad engineer felt the sudden jerk the locomotive gave as the steam once more rushed into her cylinders, he gave an awful cry and sprang at the boy furiously.

“Come away!” he cried hoarsely, and he pulled Joe from the lever, swinging him around into the tender as if he had been a child.

But the boy clung to his arm with the grasp of grim death.

The train was gathering sufficient headway to carry it into the siding and the boy determined that Gregson should not shut off steam again if he could help it.

The insane engineer seemed to comprehend that the plan he had aimed at was being defeated, and he made a superhuman effort to reach the throttle.

Joe released his arm and seized him around the waist.

Bracing his feet against the engineer’s seat and one end of the cab he pulled back as Gregson essayed to drag him forward.

The crazy man tried to get at his throat, but he could not do it, for Joe had his head pressed against the small of his back.

“Ha, ha! I’ll have you in a minute!” cried Gregson, trying to squirm around in the lad’s grasp. “I’ll choke the life out of you, and then——”

His very passion seemed to choke the rest of the sentence back down his throat.

At this moment one of Joe’s feet slipped and down they went on the floor of the cab, Gregson on top.

Half stunned by the shock the young fireman’s grasp on the mad engineer was partially released, and the man was quick to take advantage of the fact.

He tore himself loose and dashed for the lever again.

But Joe with the energy of despair was after him again, and pulled him back as his fingers were closing about the throttle.

Just then another whistle came from the down rushing express.

She was just a mile away and her speed had risen to a mile a minute.

Sixty seconds more and she would flash past the siding.

Joe heard the whistle, and at the same moment he felt the jolt of the engine as she took the siding.

"If I can hold him half a minute or so more we're safe," he muttered tensely between his set teeth.

He braced one of his boots against the hot furnace door and the other against the seat again.

The man struggled furiously.

He tried to kick out, but could not do so effectively.

"Curse you, boy!" he screamed. "You shall not escape your fate."

He did not realize that the freight was more than a third of the way up the siding.

That whatever happened to the express and the rear end of the string of box cars with the caboose at the extremity, he and the boy at least were safe.

But he did understand that he must get free and that at once, or to his mind he alone would die.

Exerting every ounce of power in his body he tore Joe away from his foothold and dashed him to the floor of the cab, where he lay helpless and half stunned.

Then with a howl of malignant triumph he grabbed the throttle and shut off the steam.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he shrieked, swinging himself far out of the cab with his frenzied eyes fastened upon the rapidly advancing glare of the headlight of the express. "Come on, Robert Vickers. We are waiting for you—your son and I. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the mountain express came on with a rush.

Her headlight grew bigger and brighter each instant.

The trembling rails hummed to the music of her ponderous driving wheels.

But the freight at decreasing speed was crawling on to safety.

And the maniac in his frenzy never noticed that 13 was far up on the siding.

He fairly shrieked with glee as he hung out and waved his hat at the approaching monster.

And now the express was upon them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" screamed Gregson with another wave of his hat as the blazing headlight seemed to dart right at him, and then with a hoarse roar the heavy train swept past like some long, slender monster rushing through the night after its prey.

That awful laugh was the last ever uttered by Gregson.

The great suction of the flashing train wound itself about him as if it had a hundred arms, and every arm a million feelers.

He fell from his slight hold on the cab and rolled under the wheels, where his body was ground to shreds and tiny patches of flesh, and his blood splattered the wheels and axles of a big sleeper.

The switchman, with his hair standing on end, his eyes starting from their sockets, had only just time to force the switch over and lock it after the caboose of the freight slipped on to the siding, when the express flew by safely at lightning speed.

As 13 came to a stop close to the west switch, Joe staggered giddily to his feet.

His forehead had struck against a projecting bolt, and blood from the wound was running down his cheek.

Not seeing the mad engineer the boy wondered where he was.

"He must have left the cab when we came to a stop. Thank heaven!" he added, as he glanced back down the siding, "both trains are safe. What a terrible experience I've had!"

The conductor now came running up.

"What in thunder does this all mean!" he exclaimed, his face still blanched from the shock of the narrowly averted disaster. "How came you to pull up back there on the main track with the express almost upon us? Why, where's Gregson?"

"I don't know," answered Joe, "I guess he must have jumped off."

"Jumped off! What for? And what's the matter with you? You look as if you'd been through a threshing machine."

"Wait till I get a drink and I'll tell you all about it."

"I can't listen now. We have to go on. Where in thunder could Gregson have gone?"

He looked down the track and saw three of the crew with lanterns gathered at a spot on the main line.

"I wonder what they're looking at?" he muttered.

He jumped down and walked back to the group, leaving Joe to recover his energies and freshen himself up a bit.

Every moment the boy expected to see Gregson swing himself up into the cab, and he held himself on the alert for the engineer's sudden appearance.

In the meanwhile the conductor reached the spot where the three brakemen were standing.

"What's up?" he asked impatiently.

"Look at that," said one of the men pointing. "Some one has been torn to bits by the express. That's fresh blood, and there are bits of flesh all over the track."

The evidence before them was conclusive.

The conductor made an investigation.

"Must have been a tramp," he remarked, when he found that the telegraph operator was at his post.

He and the switchman were the only employes at the siding.

"Haven't seen any tramp, or any one else, around here for hours," said the switchman, positively.

"Well, a man has been ground up under the wheels of the express all right within fifteen feet of where 13 is standing yonder. So somebody must have been on the track at the time the train passed."

Then the conductor went back to the locomotive, expecting to find Gregson back in the cab by this time.

But of course he wasn't.

The conductor began to fume and to swear a little.

Joe took advantage of the chance to tell his story as briefly as possible.

To say that the conductor was astonished would be putting it quite mild.

The result was he came to the conclusion that Gregson

must either have fallen or thrown himself under the wheels of the express.

"Well, this is a nice scrape," he said, scratching his head in perplexity. "Here we are stalled half way up the mountains without an engineer. I'll have to telegraph for instructions."

"I think I can help you out, sir," said Joe.

"You?"

"Send me a brakeman to fire, and I'll take the train through to Trinidad."

"But you're not an engineer."

"I can handle a locomotive all right, sir."

"Maybe you can in the yard, but you've never been over the line, even as a fireman, before."

"That's right. All the same, I'm confident I can run the train through with perfect safety."

"Well, I'll telegraph the circumstances to Pandora, and mention that you claim to be competent to run this train through. The superintendent must decide the matter."

"All right, sir."

The message was dispatched, and in a short time word came back to go ahead.

After a delay of twenty minutes altogether, the freight, with Joe Vickers at the throttle, pulled out of the siding at Black Rock and headed westward up the steep grade, with an all-night run between that place and Trinidad.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW JOE SAVES THE LIFE OF FLORENCE VAN SLYCK.

The freight arrived at Palmyra, at the western foothills, about 3:30 in the morning, the run from the summit being made without steam and with the brakes on at intervals.

Trinidad was reached at six.

Here Joe put 13 in the roundhouse, and after attending to her, made out his report, and took it to the office of the division superintendent.

Then he looked up a boarding-house, had his breakfast, and went to bed.

A new engineer had been assigned to 13, and he came to Trinidad on the day express.

His name was Dan Beard.

He was an old and reliable man, formerly employed on the passenger trains.

Sickness had kept him off of the road for some months and now having reported again and requested employment he was put on the freight, that being the best that could be done for him at the present time.

Joe met him that afternoon in the yard at Trinidad, and took an immediate liking to him, a feeling that was reciprocated by Beard, who was much struck by the breezy manner and gentlemanly deportment of his young fireman.

"I hear you had quite a lively time of it last night on 13 with that crazy Gregson, who was chewed up by the night express at Black Rock siding," said Beard, after the two had got acquainted.

"I should say I had," replied Joe, with a serious counte-

nance, for the recollection, especially its connection with his father's death, was far from pleasant.

Of course he had not mentioned even a hint in his official report of Gregson's confession about how his father's death had been brought about.

Nor had he confided the secret to the conductor of the train.

And when he narrated his experience to Beard, that part was carefully kept in the background.

He intended that the knowledge, which he did not doubt was true, should never pass his lips, not even to his mother, for he felt it would only serve to reopen a wound not yet healed by time.

"You're just the kind of chap I should have chosen, if the preference had been left to me, for a cab partner," said Dan Beard, in his honest, hearty way which attracted Joe to him.

"Thank you, Mr. Beard," replied the boy. "I might say the same of you."

"Well, that's comforting," said the engineer. "I fancy we shall get on very well together."

"I hope so, sir. It won't be my fault if we don't."

"That's the way to talk," smiled Beard, in a tone of satisfaction. "It isn't every one that I hitch to; but there's something about you, my lad, that tells me that we're going to make a first-rate team."

"It is certainly an advantage for a new hand like me to fall in with a good man like you, who will give me a fair show and not to try to knock me at the first chance, like some of the other engineers have the habit of doing with other new firemen."

"I'm not a knocker, my lad. No man, whether he's pulled with me or not, has ever had it in his power to say that I tried to do him. It isn't my nature. Everything fair and above board is my motto. If I don't like my working partner I try to bring about a change in an honorable way. Those are my sentiments, and you can judge me by them."

"Well, Mr. Beard, I am glad you think I will suit you. I shall do my best to prove deserving of your good opinion."

"I feel sure you will. And on my side I will help you to reach the ambition of every fireman—that is, to become a competent engineer."

"Thank you, sir," answered Joe gratefully.

At eight that night 13 coupled on to the eastbound freight and started back toward Pandora.

The country between Trinidad and Palmyra was perfectly level.

It was cultivated in sections, other sections being overgrown with a tall and dense mass of prairie grass, interspersed with a sprinkling of trees, and sometimes of whole woods reaching nearly to the tracks, which were double between those points.

Palmyra was a busy and prosperous town, almost a city, and was intersected by a narrow river which had its source somewhere up in the mountain range which began at the very doors of the town, one might say.

The freight, drawn by 13, passed through Palmyra, crossing a wooden bridge at the northern end of the town, about 10:30, and then began its climb toward the summit, several thousand feet above.

At 11 the freight ran on the siding at Lone Tree to get out of the way of the eastbound night express, which passed that point at 11:10, after which 13 and her thirty odd box cars continued on their way to the summit, where the train took the siding again for the westbound night freight.

At seven o'clock next morning 13 was leading the way across the farming district toward Pandora at a merry clip.

At the same hour Herbert Chase, with Miss Florence Van Slyck, daughter of Judge Van Slyck, and the prettiest girl in Pandora, as his companion, were taking an early spin in the Chase automobile along the county road.

The train and the automobile reached the crossing at the same moment.

This was largely due to the fact that when Herbert had spied the freight coming along at a speed of nearly eighteen miles an hour, he decided upon the questionable experiment of beating the train and getting across first, as he was too impatient to wait for the long line of box cars to pass.

At the last moment he realized he had made a fatal mistake, and having an uncommon respect for his own elegant little person he leaped out on the grass, accepting an unpleasant tumble and shaking up with the best grace he could, and left his machine with its fair passenger to their almost certain fate.

Miss Florence saw her danger and with a scream rose to her feet.

The locomotive, however, was only a few yards away, and there is no doubt that the girl would have been fatally injured or instantly killed but for the presence of mind and courage of Joe Vickers.

He was leaning out of the cab window ringing the bell when he saw the rapid approach of the automobile.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, calling Beard's attention to the swiftly moving machine. "They're going to try to cross as sure as you live."

Dan took in the situation, whistled down brakes, pulled over the reverse lever, put on the locomotive brake, and let down sand on the tracks, but for all that the distance to the road was too short for these emergency efforts to be of much avail.

While the engineer was doing his level best to avert the impending catastrophe, Joe sprang out of the cab and ran along the engine foot-board till he reached the pilot.

Here he saw that a collision was certain.

Was it possible for him to save the beautiful young girl at the moment the locomotive hit the auto?

The chances were he could not.

"At least I will make the effort," he breathed.

It was at that thrilling moment that Herbert Chase showed the white feather and abandoned the vehicle and his gentle companion.

"The coward!" gritted Joe, as he saw the boy roll over

and over on the grass by the roadside. "Serve him right if he's smashed into bits."

But Herbert had luck on his side, and fetched up in a soft bit of ooze, near the fence, without sustaining any injury except to his summer suit of clothes.

A second later the auto was under the headlight and Joe, reaching out as far as he could with his right arm, while he clung with the other to the curved bar in front of the boiler, he grasped Miss Van Slyck by the arm and fairly dragged her on to the iron platform on which he stood, just as the automobile was hurled, a mass of wreckage, against the fence at the corner of the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONLY THE BRAVE DESERVE THE FAIR.

When the freight came to a stop, Joe carried Florence Van Slyck into the cab.

Although she did not faint, nor give way to hysterics, she was a pretty badly frightened girl.

"You had a very narrow escape, miss," said Dan Beard, as Joe handed the lovely miss a tin cup of water.

"I should think I had," she replied, as she recovered her composure somewhat. "And to think Herbert Chase was the cause of it all, because he would insist on heading off the cars in spite of my remonstrances. Was he hurt?"

"I think not," answered Joe, drily. "He jumped out before the locomotive struck the auto."

"I know he did, and left me to be run down, the mean little coward!" Florence exclaimed, indignantly. "I'll never notice him again as long as I live."

"He certainly ought to be ashamed of himself," interjected the engineer. "If he was responsible for the scrape the least he should have done was to stick by you, sink or swim."

"I believe I would have been killed if it hadn't been for you," said Miss Van Slyck, looking gratefully at Joe. "I am sure I never can thank you sufficiently for your bravery."

"I hope you won't let that fact worry you, Miss——"

Joe paused and looked at her inquiringly.

"Florence Van Slyck is my name," said the girl. "My father is Judge Van Slyck."

Dan Beard knew that the judge was Pandora's most prominent lawyer, and one of the town's leading citizens.

Joe also had a general idea that the judge was a man of even more local importance than Godfrey Chase, which was saying a great deal.

In the meanwhile, Herbert Chase had picked himself out of the mud, and he presented rather a sorry spectacle.

His nice new light summer suit was ruined, for, besides the dirt and ooze which covered it, several bad rents were to be seen in his coat and trousers.

The automobile was in flames, what was left of it, as the gasoline tank had exploded.

There wasn't a particle of use in trying to put out the flames, as the machine was practically reduced to a mass of junk, anyway.

"Didn't you hear the whistle and the bell?" asked the

conductor, when he came up. "What made you try to head the train when it was so close upon you?"

"I thought I could beat it across," replied Herbert, in a crestfallen way.

"It's just such recklessness that leads to so many accidents—many of them fatal. It's a wonder you were not killed. Have any one with you?"

"Yes."

"Who?" asked the conductor, looking around for Herbert's companion.

"A girl. Miss Florence Van Slyck."

The official gave a startled whistle.

"Great Moses!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean the daughter of Judge Van Slyck?"

Herbert nodded.

"Then, where is she? She must have been killed—buried in the ruins of that blazing wreck. Come on!" he cried, excitedly, for he had a proper respect for wealth and influence, to the group of trainmen who stood around, "we must save the body at least!"

At that moment Dan Beard signaled to the conductor.

While Herbert was occupying the attention of the conductor and train crew, Miss Florence got her nerves into working shape again and insisted on saying all manner of complimentary things to Joe.

"My father is a big stockholder in this railroad, and he will see that you are suitably rewarded for saving my life."

"But I don't want to be rewarded," protested the boy, with some embarrassment.

"Why not?" she asked, in some surprise.

"Because I only did my duty, miss. And I am fully paid with the knowledge that I did save you."

Miss Van Slyck opened her pretty eyes very wide and regarded the handsome young fireman with a new interest.

"But at least you will promise to call at our home and let my father and mother thank you for the service you have rendered me. I am sure they will not be satisfied unless you do."

"I don't know," the boy answered, doubtfully, for he had some idea what such an interview meant, and he didn't fancy the role of a hero.

"Please do," pleaded the girl, earnestly. "Won't you oblige me?"

What could Joe do under the circumstances?

What would any boy have done in a similar position?

Here was an uncommonly lovely girl of fifteen, with fluffy golden hair and pleading, sapphire-blue eyes, begging him to grant her the favor she earnestly wished for.

Could he or any other boy refuse?

Well, hardly.

Joe, with some reluctance, promised to call at her home that afternoon.

He realized the social gulf which lay between Judge Van Slyck's position and his own humble station in life.

And this knowledge embarrassed him, though it is quite true he hoped one day to rise to the same plane as the judge himself, for all things are possible in America for a boy who has the ambition to contrive and the will to carry

out his views, but Joe felt that a long space of time lay between the anticipation and the wished-for realization.

"I shall hold you to your promise," Florence said, with one of her captivating smiles that quite upset the boy, and caused him to wish after the unattainable.

At this point the conductor came up.

When his eyes lighted on Miss Van Slyck, seated contentedly in the cab, he was a thoroughly surprised man.

"Aren't you hurt at all?" he asked, hardly able to believe the evidence of his eyes.

She shook her head and favored him with a saucy smile.

"Well, well," with a long breath of relief, "how did you escape?"

"This young man, Joseph Vickers," and she looked at Joe to make sure she had his name right, whereat he nodded, "pulled me right out of the automobile when the locomotive struck the machine."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the conductor.

"Yes, sir," corroborated Dan Beard, "and it was the nerviest thing I ever saw done, and I've seen a few in my time."

"Young man, you've done a big thing," said the conductor, solemnly. "You've made a powerful friend, for Judge Van Slyck is bound to recognize the obligation, and that is everything these days."

Joe couldn't help knowing that he had done a big thing, as the world looks at it, but he hoped Judge Van Slyck wouldn't put himself out about the matter.

"Go ahead, Dan," said the conductor. "You may ride in on the engine, Miss Van Slyck."

"May I? I'm so glad! I've just wanted to ride on an engine ever so bad," she replied, delightedly.

The engineer opened up slowly to give the conductor and the train crew time to get aboard, taking Herbert up into the caboose.

This having been accomplished, Beard let old 13 out at her best speed to try and make up a part of the time lost.

Joe showed Florence how to pull the bell-rope as soon as they reached the outskirts of Pandora, and Dan slowed down to the regulation gait.

"Isn't this fun!" she exclaimed, as she worked her shapely little arm and the bell ding-donged away, many onlookers regarding the girl in the cab with wonder.

And in this way the freight train pulled into the yard.

When 13 was uncoupled, Florence was carried into the roundhouse, and when the locomotive came to her final rest, Joe politely assisted the girl to descend from her elevated perch.

"How am I to get out?" she asked, in a mystified way.

"I will pilot the way for you," replied the boy, gallantly.

"Thank you. I'm ever so much obliged."

"I think I had better take you over to the master mechanic's office," he said. "Mr. Ditchett will see that you are sent home all right."

"Just as you think best, Mr. Vickers," she answered, with a smile.

"There's your friend, Herbert Chase," said Joe. "I guess he's waiting for you."

"I don't want to see him," she said, with a disdainful toss of her head.

"I'm afraid you can't help yourself, as he is standing at the door of the office."

She stopped short.

"Then I don't want to go there," she replied, firmly.

"But——" began Joe, not knowing how to proceed.

Herbert, however, had caught sight of her and hastened to join her.

"I'm so glad you escaped all right, Miss Florence," he gushed, rushing forward and officiously interposing himself between Joe and the girl. "I will see you home at once."

"I don't think you will, Herbert Chase," she replied, drawing back. "Our acquaintance ceases from this moment."

"Why, Miss Florence——"

"That I'm not dead at this moment is no fault of yours," she snapped, angrily. "If it had not been for the bravery of this boy, Joseph Vickers, I probably would have been. He's a hero, while you—I've no words to express my opinion of you."

Herbert Chase was taken all aback, and he darted a baleful look at Joe, as if he held him responsible for the trouble.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGGER IN THE WOODPILE.

"I hope you don't compare me with a common engine wiper, Miss Florence," said Herbert, with a sneer.

"What do you mean by an engine wiper?" flashed Miss Van Slyck.

"That's what this fellow is. The lowest, commonest position in the railroad company."

Joe flushed to the roots of his hair at this insult.

"I think you make a mistake, Herbert Chase. A boy may be an engine wiper and be a gentleman, too. It is honest work, and no one need be ashamed to engage in it. Mr. Ditchett, the master mechanic of this road, was once a wiper on this road. At any rate, I am no longer a wiper. I have been promoted.

"You have been promoted!" exclaimed Herbert, incredulously.

"Yes. I am a regular fireman on the freight."

"Well, that isn't so much. It's only a step above a wiper."

"I think you asked me if I meant to compare you with this boy," said Florence, with flashing eyes, for she was thoroughly disgusted with Herbert's conduct. "No. I shouldn't think of comparing you with him."

"I should think not," said Herbert, complacently.

"Because," she continued, cuttingly, "you're not his equal in courage, in politeness nor manliness—in fact, you're not in his class at all. The only advantage you have over him is your father's money and influence. I wish you to understand that I am proud to know him, even if he was still an engine wiper, as you call it. As for you, I don't care to know you any longer. And I am sure my parents will agree with my resolution when they learn how you acted in the hour of our mutual peril. That has

stamped you as a coward in my eyes, and you have now proved yourself no gentleman by deliberately insulting this boy in my presence. I wish you good-by. Will you show me into the office, Mr. Vickers?"

Herbert stood rooted to the spot with rage and mortification.

He had never experienced such a taking-down in his life. And to think Florence Van Slyck, the girl he thought the most of in town, was the one to rake him over the coals.

Not only that, but she had degraded him before a common railroad employe.

Worst of all, he knew in his inmost soul that he deserved every word of censure she had administered to him.

That, however, didn't make it any the more palatable.

Well, he would have revenge, at any rate.

Not on Miss Van Slyck, because that was out of the question.

He would make Joe Vickers suffer for it all.

"I'll tell father to fire him from the road," he gritted, unpleasantly. "That will take him down a peg or two, I guess. I'd like to see him in the poorhouse. I'll make it my business to see that he doesn't get another job in Pandora, the stuck-up beggar. Oh, how I hate him! So, I'm not in the same class with him! I should think not. If he's Miss Van Slyck's idea of a gentleman, I can't say much for her taste."

Then his thought reverted to the condition of his clothes.

"I can't go through the streets looking like a tramp," he growled. "I'll have to go to Dobbin's livery stable in the next block and hire a rig. That reminds me, I haven't had breakfast yet, and it must be after nine o'clock. I wonder how I'll square myself with the governor for the loss of the auto?" he mused, as he started out of the railroad yard. "Well, he's got loads of coin. Let him buy another."

When Joe got home that morning he found his mother anxiously awaiting his return.

"I've never been so lonely as during the interval you've been away from home, Joe," she said, kissing him fondly.

"I'm sorry, mother," he answered; "but you know I can't regulate my time," said the boy, as he sat down to his breakfast.

"I am not complaining, my son. We must bow to the regulations of the company. I wish, however, that you had a day run."

"The night trips are the least desirable, and that is why the new hands get them, I suppose."

"We must be satisfied with the reflection that you have been promoted to a better position. I am glad you are done with engine wiping at last."

"So am I, mother. My next step will probably be to fire a passenger locomotive—maybe the express. And then——"

"And then?" repeated Mrs. Vickers, with a smile.

"When fully competent I expect to become an engineer."

"Is that the height of your ambition, Joe?"

"No, mother, far from it. Some day I mean to be general manager of the Nimrod & Pandora, or some other road," he said, enthusiastically.

"You are looking a long way ahead, are you not?"

"Why not, mother? I think one ought to aim high, and then try to work up to it. It is no disgrace if you do not always hit the mark. At least it is a satisfaction to feel that one has done his best to get there."

"You have more ambition than your poor father. He was content to be a good engineer. He never expected to rise higher than that."

"Father was all right in his way. I may never be able to get higher myself. But I think I will, if I live, for the young man has more opportunities to-day for advancement than ever before, and I don't mean to be left behind if I can help it."

"Now, Joe, I have something to tell you that will surprise you."

"What is it, mother?" asked the boy, curiously.

"Mr. Chase called on me yesterday afternoon."

"You don't mean that, do you?" pushing back his chair and looking at her.

"Yes."

"I hope he hasn't any designs on this cottage, has he?"

"Oh, no. How could he, as long as I pay the interest promptly?"

"When is the balance of the principal due?"

"Not for two years yet."

"Well, that's a satisfaction. You have \$500 in bank, and I expect to earn enough money to clear it off by that time," said Joe, confidently.

"I trust you will, my son, but I think it will not be necessary."

"How so?" asked Joe, in some surprise.

"Mr. Chase has pointed out a way by which I can cancel the mortgage and have a sum of money to put in the bank besides."

"You don't say!" ejaculated the astonished boy. "Mr. Chase seems to have grown very considerate of us all of a sudden. What's behind it?"

"My son, you seem to be unreasonably suspicious of Mr. Chase."

"Not unreasonably, mother. If I am mistaken in him I shall be only too willing to accord him the justice he may deserve. Tell me what he said to you."

"Well, he made me an offer to take back that parcel of land he deeded to your father in full payment for his note of \$2,500. He said the matter has weighed heavily on his conscience of late. He feels that he did your father an injustice. But he excused himself on the ground that he was short of money at the time."

"That may be true enough. But he hasn't been short of money these last ten years. Look at the value of his stock in the Nimrod & Pandora, which is selling 'way above par! Look at his elegant house on Riverside Drive! Well, what did he have to propose?" asked Joe, with considerable interest.

"He is willing to give us the full \$2,500, with interest to date, for the return of that property."

"Oh, he is?" said Joe, with a whistle of surprise. "Why, that would be something like \$4,000, I should imagine."

"He had it figured out. It was something like that."

"And what did you say to it, mother?"

"I was very much astonished at the offer, and very much delighted. Why, \$4,000 is a pile of money."

"To us, yes; but nothing to speak of to Mr. Godfrey Chase."

"He wanted me to sign the deed which he had brought with him, but of course I would not do that without your consent, as the property is yours. He seemed to be much disappointed, for he said he had brought the check with him—he showed it to me—and intimated that his time was very valuable. However, he said he would call again this afternoon."

"Mother, you did quite right. The more I look at this man's sudden eagerness to get hold of the land now, the more I suspect that he has in some way discovered that it is worth much more than the \$4,000 that he offers us for it. Maybe the gold brick he saddled on father has developed into a real, simon-pure gold brick, 18 or even 22-karats fine. Who knows!"

Joe looked at his mother with shining eyes.

"How can we tell that, Joe?" she asked, doubtfully.

"The only way to tell is to investigate."

"And who will take the trouble to investigate this land for you?"

"I think I know some one who will help me out. When Mr. Chase calls this afternoon, put him off. Give him any old excuse. I've got a date at Judge Van Slyck's this afternoon, and I'll talk the thing over with him."

"Why, what should take you to Judge Van Slyck's, Joe?" asked his mother, in great surprise, for she was well aware of the social importance of the Van Slycks.

"I promised Miss Florence Van Slyck that I would call."

"What business can take you there?"

"I will explain," he replied, with a breezy laugh. "I rendered Miss Van Slyck a service this morning, and she wouldn't take no for an answer, but I must call and see her father and mother this afternoon. So I'm going to get into my Sunday togs and make my debut into the cream of Pandora society. It will be your turn next, mother," he added, gaily; "so you want to look up your finery when the time comes."

Then Joe told his mother of his thrilling rescue of Florence that morning.

Of course Mrs. Vickers felt very proud to learn that her dear boy had proved his courage in so signal a manner, though she could not repress a shudder when she thought of the risk he ran.

"The Van Slycks are very nice people," she said; "much nicer, I think, than the Chases."

"Well, I guess!" replied Joe, with some energy.

"But you can hardly expect that you will be allowed to associate with Florence as an equal—the lines of society are too strongly drawn for that. They will no doubt treat you very kindly—that is to be expected under the unusual circumstances—but I hope, Joe, you will not impose on their friendship."

"That's all right, mother. I'm only a fireman on the

road of which the judge is senior counsel. But I mean to consult him about that plot of land—father's gold brick."

"I see no objection to that. He may be able to advise you as to its value."

"Now, mother, I've more to tell you. I met with a singular and exciting experience on the engine last night. It's a wonder you didn't notice the story in the morning's paper."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Vickers, somewhat disturbed.

Joe at once related what he had gone through with at the hands of the crazy engineer of 13, but he was careful to hold back everything he had heard from the frenzied lips of Gregson, which affected his father's death and the causes leading up to it.

"You had a very narrow escape, my boy," said Mrs. Vickers, tearfully. "And the man was really ground to death by the express?" she added, with a shudder.

"Yes, mother, he was. And now 13 has a new engineer—Dan Beard. He's taken a great fancy to me, and I to him. I am sure we shall be great friends."

Having thus reassured his mother, Joe went out to visit a friend.

After dinner he got ready to call on the Van Slycks.

"I don't like this offer of Mr. Chase's for that property," he mused, as he dressed himself. "That man isn't to be trusted, wealthy as he is accounted to be. It's my opinion there is a nigger in the woodpile, and I'm going to make it my business to bring him to the light."

CHAPTER X.

JOE CALLS AT JUDGE VAN SLYCK'S HOME.

It was about three o'clock that Joe reached the residence of Judge Van Slyck, marched up the gravel path which led to the front door, and rang the bell.

He gave his name to the maid, and was shown into the parlor.

In a few minutes the maid returned and asked him to walk into the library.

Judge Van Slyck rose from a big, leather-covered revolving chair in front of his desk, came forward and greeted his young visitor warmly.

"I am very glad to make the acquaintance of so brave and manly a lad as you have proved yourself to be," he said. "In saving the life of our only child, Florence, you have placed us under a debt of gratitude we can never repay."

Joe was clearly embarrassed in the presence of so dignified and important a personage as Judge Van Slyck, and the lawyer, observing it, hastened to put him at his ease.

"Sit down here, I would like to talk with you," and he led the boy to a seat beside his desk. "How long have you been in the company's employ?"

"About a year, sir."

"You began as a wiper in the roundhouse, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And have been recently advanced to fireman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your father and mother—may I ask if they are alive?"

"My mother is. My father was engineer on the express for many years. He was killed in an accident at Black Rock siding, three years ago."

"I recall the lamentable occurrence," said the judge. "I presume the company provided for your mother."

"No, sir," replied Joe, with a trace of bitterness in his tone, "the company did nothing for mother beyond paying for father's funeral expenses."

"You astonish me," and the judge looked it. "How was that?"

Joe told him that his father had been held accountable for the catastrophe.

"It was a false and cruel allegation," added the boy, resentfully. "Until lately I believed it was the fault of the engine which father had to take out that day, as he found something the matter with her, which he reported, but it was not attended to. But I believe now the accident was brought about by a switch which had been tampered with."

"On what evidence do you make this assertion?" asked the amazed lawyer.

Joe rehearsed the events of his first trip up the mountains with Gregson, the engineer who had unaccountably gone insane during the run to Black Rock siding.

The judge listened attentively, then shook his head.

"The man was clearly mad," he said. "You ought not to place any dependence on his talk. Still," thoughtfully "there might have been something in it, if he really owed your father a grudge."

"I believe he did."

Joe then mentioned the attitude assumed at the time toward his mother by Godfrey Chase, the president of the road.

"You say Mr. Chase was an old friend of your father's," remarked Judge Van Slyck.

"Yes, sir; but when Mr. Chase grew rich and became a railroad magnate he ceased to have any further interest in us."

Judge Van Slyck asked the boy many questions about his father's connection with the road, and afterward about his own plans and ambitions, and the lad's answers interested him greatly.

Finally Joe spoke about the piece of property which Mr. Chase had worked off on his father, and now seemed so anxious to recover.

He showed the deed to the lawyer and asked him if he would interest himself in it so far as to ascertain what the property really was worth.

"I will do so with great pleasure," said Judge Van Slyck, taking the deed and making a note of the matter.

At this point Mrs. Van Slyck entered the room, accompanied by her daughter.

Florence greeted Joe effusively.

"Mother," she said, "this is Joseph Vickers, the bravest boy in Pandora."

Mrs. Van Slyck expressed the pleasure she felt in meeting the lad to whom she was indebted for the rescue of her dear child from a most perilous situation.

"The judge and myself will never forget what we owe

you, Mr. Vickers; and I hope you will look upon us as your most sincere and grateful friends."

Joe bowed, and said he believed that he had only done his duty.

His modest and gentlemanly manner favorably impressed the judge and his wife.

His good looks and manly way had their effect on Florence.

"Aren't you glad to be the hero of a thrilling adventure?" asked the girl, roguishly, when they were left by themselves for a little while.

"I don't know," replied Joe, slightly embarrassed by her question.

"I think you ought to be," she said, gaily. "It isn't every young man who gets the chance to save a young lady's life at the risk of his own."

"I'm afraid you exaggerate my share of the proceedings. I was fortunate in being able to catch you, Miss Van Slyck."

"But you saved me, just the same, didn't you?"

Joe had to admit that fact.

"I think it just too delightful to be rescued by a nice young man."

Joe blushed and said nothing.

"I said you were a nice young man," repeated Florence, apparently enjoying his confusion; "and you don't seem to have a word to say."

"I was paralyzed by the remark," blurted out the young fireman.

"Well, don't you think you are a nice young man?" persisted his fair tormentor.

"I haven't given the matter any thought," replied Joe, beginning to pluck up courage in his own defense. "It is rather a difficult question to answer," he added, growing bolder, "when such a pretty girl as yourself insists on a reply."

"Well," she said, with a little gasp and a rosy blush, "you certainly are improving."

"I couldn't do otherwise under the charming influence of your presence," he said, gallantly.

"Are you in the habit of reading novels, Mr. Vickers?"

"No, Miss Van Slyck. "My time is otherwise employed."

"Then you must be a natural born hero. No doubt you have been longing for years for an opportunity to rescue some unfortunate young lady from a situation similar to that which occurred this morning. Your patience has at last been rewarded, and I am the victim."

"Then I am to infer that you would have preferred not to have been rescued? Is that it?" said Joe, with a grin.

"Oh, dear, no!" she hastily replied. "I assure you I am deeply grateful that you appeared at the nick of time, otherwise I'm afraid I wouldn't be here now to enjoy myself at the expense of such a nice young man as yourself."

"If I afford you that pleasure I am satisfied I have not lived in vain."

"How delightfully you say that. I don't know but, on the whole, I should congratulate myself on having been saved by such a nice——"

"Please don't, Miss Van Slyck," protested Joe, rather enjoying the girl's good-natured banter.

Florence was simply overflowing with life and vivaciousness, and though she was deeply conscious of the debt she owed the boy, and grateful to him, down to the very bottom of her warm little heart, she couldn't help acting as she did if she died for it.

The entrance of Judge Van Slyck at this moment prevented any further exhibition of the young lady's pleasure, and Joe rose to take his leave.

"Wait a moment," said the judge, and, going to his desk, took a small pasteboard box from one of the pigeon-holes. "On behalf of Mrs. Van Slyck and myself I wish to present you with this slight token of our esteem and gratitude."

Thus speaking, Judge Van Slyck opened the box, took out an elegant gold watch and chain and handed it to Joe.

The boy was surprised and overpowered by this testimonial of appreciation.

He accepted it with a few words of thanks.

"You must call on us soon again," said the judge, kindly.

"Certainly you must," insisted Florence. "We didn't finish our conversation, you know," she added, with a winning smile.

And Joe promised to call some evening soon.

CHAPTER XI.

JOE'S FIRST TRIP AS ENGINEER.

Two weeks passed away, during which Joe made his regular trips on 13 with Dan Beard, over the mountains, with the freight, between Pandora and Trinidad.

Dan devoted his spare moments to the instruction of the boy, and allowed Joe frequently to take long spells at the throttle to familiarize himself thoroughly with the handling of a locomotive.

Joe made rapid progress under the patronage of his new friend, and possessing the knack of picking things up fast, and having a strong sympathy with his work, he was soon fairly competent to run an engine under all the circumstances he had faced thus far.

"I happen to know that the road is short of engineers," Dan said to Joe, one morning, as they were running in toward Pandora. "And it wouldn't surprise me in the least if you soon got a chance to show what you're made of in the engineering line."

"I hardly think so," answered the boy, doubtfully; "that's almost too good to be true. I've only been firing three weeks, and whether I'm competent or not to fill the bill, Mr. Ditchett would hardly be able to form any idea as to my ability as an engineer."

"The master mechanic was speaking to me about you the day before yesterday. He's keeping his eye on you, I am positive. You're bright and smart, and the way you pick up things is a caution. The way you took Gregson's place when the man went daft just before he committed suicide, and carried the freight all the way to Trinidad

without ever having been over the road before, was bound to attract attention to you. You were on time to the minute, and the brakeman who fired for you reported that you went through your ticklish duty like an old hand. Abel Hyde has been on a spree ever since you saved him from being run over in the yard. Then Brice, one of the freight engineers, is down with malarial fever. And Judson, another, broke his leg and is in the hospital."

"The company seems to be having hard luck with their engineers."

"Such things happen every once in a while, and then some of the firemen get their chance to step up another notch. If they make good, it usually leads to a steady job at the throttle."

"Of course I'd like to get a chance, as firing is pretty hard work and often a thankless job; but to tell the truth, I'd hate to part from you."

"Same here, my lad; but I'm afraid we sha'n't hang together as a team long, in any event."

"Why not, Mr. Beard?" asked the boy, not a little dismayed at the idea of separation from his friend.

"Well, I got a hint from the master mechanic that this might be my last trip on 13. He gave me to understand that it was more than probable I should get 44, Hyde's engine, which takes out the day express."

This was unpleasant intelligence for Joe, and for the rest of the way to town he looked as glum as he felt.

While attending to his final duties in connection with 13 in the roundhouse, Beard walked in and came up to him.

"Well, Joe, we're both through with 13, I'm thinking. At any rate, I am, for I go out with the express to-morrow morning. As for yourself, Mr. Ditchett told me to tell you to report at his office before you go home. That means there's something in the wind. He asked me a lot of questions as to your capability to handle an engine, from which I judge you are slated for promotion. It may be only temporary to fill a gap, but it's up to you to make the most of the chance if it really comes your way."

Joe's heart gave a great bound.

Now that it was certain that he and Dan were no longer to pull together, he was simply delighted at the bare idea that he might be placed at the throttle.

"Of course it will be a switch engine, if anything," he remarked.

"That doesn't follow," replied Beard, with a smile. "But whatever you may get will mean a step forward, and that's what you're looking for."

In twenty minutes Joe sent his name into the master mechanic, and was asked to walk into the inner office.

"I was told you wanted to see me, sir," said the boy, respectfully.

"Hum!" and Ditchett looked him over, much as he had done when Joe was first called before him, three weeks previous. "You fired for Gregson, I believe, on your first trip over the mountains?" said the master mechanic, abruptly.

"Yes, sir," replied Joe, promptly.

"Gregson lost his life at Black Rock siding, and you ran the freight the rest of the way to Trinidad, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Been firing for Beard ever since, I think."

"I have."

"Consider yourself capable of handling an engine, I suppose?" and Mr. Ditchett fixed him with his sharp eyes.

"Yes, sir," replied Joe, confidently, but with becoming modesty.

"Humph! How do you know?" sharply.

Joe proceeded to give his reasons, and referred the master mechanic to Dan Beard as authority for his statement.

"Hum! I want a man to go down the road right away, about thirty miles, and bring up a coal train. Will you go?"

"Yes, sir."

"Haven't had your breakfast yet, have you?"

"No, sir. I'd like to get a bite before I go out."

"Very well. There's a restaurant outside. Take twenty minutes, and then report to Mr. Radway. That's all."

Joe sent word to his mother that he wouldn't be able to get home for some hours, got outside of a cup of coffee and a small steak, and then returned to the yard.

"The coal train is on a siding up Silver Bow Branch," said the yardmaster. "You want to get it here as soon as you can."

"Very well, sir."

"You will take No. 15. She's waiting for you yonder."

Joe walked over to the locomotive and tender.

A bright young wiper, who had been recently promoted, was going to fire for him.

Vickers climbed into the cab.

"Hello, Oliver!" addressing his assistant, with whom he was well acquainted. "I see you've got a boost, too."

"Yep. I've been firing in the yard for a week. She's all ready to start. I've coaled, watered and oiled her up, so all you've to do is to pull out."

"All right. Ring."

Joe felt like a king when he opened 15 up, glided on to the main track and thence out of the yard.

There were trains, of course, to be avoided on the road, but the boy ran down to Silver Bow Branch in good time and then up to the siding, where he found the coal cars already made up.

He had nothing to do but to couple on and start off, and he lost no time in doing so.

He had to hang up at one siding for the afternoon mail to pass, and she was six minutes behind.

That took fifteen minutes, and half an hour more was consumed at another siding, while he waited for a couple of passenger trains, one either way, to go by.

A last stop was made at Pagoda Junction to avoid the eastbound day express from Grand Junction, and for the rest of the way in to Pandora, Joe had a clear track, and he made 15 hump herself.

Finally he ran into the yard with his long train of coal cars, and shortly after, with a sigh of relief, he took 15 to the roundhouse and left her in charge of his fireman.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE GRASP OF HIS ENEMIES.

When Joe left the yard that afternoon for home, he had orders to report next morning for instructions.

It was the talk of the yard that engineers were scarce just at the moment on the Nimrod & Pandora road.

The contributing reason for this state of affairs was that the general manager had been cutting down expenses and running everything close.

The real reason was that just when spare men were at a premium, Hyde and two or three other competent engineers were put out by drink and sickness, and that put the road in a bit of a hole, which it was necessary to fill, temporarily at any rate, from the firemen, whose places in turn were recruited from among the wipers.

In addition, many of the engineers and firemen were overworked, by being forced to make extra trips, which is not an uncommon occurrence on some roads, though a railroad always takes a risk when it works its employes to death to save a few dollars.

Joe reached home and found his mother somewhat worried over his prolonged absence, notwithstanding the text of the note he had sent her that morning, previous to his departure down the road after the coal train.

She started to get dinner right away, as he declared he was as hungry as a bear, which fact she didn't wonder at; and while thus employed, Joe explained how he had been engaged since he came in with the freight in the morning.

"Mr. Chase was here again this morning about that property."

"Seems very anxious to square himself with us, doesn't he, mother?"

"He does, indeed."

"This is the fifth time, I think, he has honored us with a call on the subject."

"I haven't kept count. I know he has called several times."

"Now, mother, it isn't at all like Godfrey Chase to put himself out to that extent merely to do us a favor, as he claims, is it?"

"He certainly hasn't noticed us before in years."

"Then I feel more certain than ever that there is something in the background."

"When do you expect to hear from Judge Van Slyck about the property?"

"I am unable to say. He promised to attend to it, and as it is a favor on his part, of course it is not for me to hurry him. He is a very busy man."

"It would be well to have the matter settled one way or the other as soon as possible, for Mr. Chase thinks it very strange that we hesitate over the reconveyance of the property to him under such favorable terms as he has proposed."

"How did you manage to head him off to-day?"

"I told him you had not come to a decision yet."

"What did he say to that?"

"He rather bluntly called you a fool, and said that the property being in my name I ought not to be so foolish

as to be guided by your ridiculous ideas when a matter of \$4,000 was to be so easily picked up."

"I am much obliged to him for his fine opinion of me. It is nothing more than I might expect from him. I hope you gave him to understand that the property was practically out of your hands. That I had bought it of you for \$500."

"I have already told him that twice, but he pooh-poohed at it. He said I was your natural guardian, which, of course, is true, and that whatever technically belonged to you was entirely under my control, and that I had a perfectly legal right to sell the property, or anything else in that line to which you might lay claim, if I chose to do so. He said it was preposterous for me to defer to the opinion of a mere boy like you."

"He handled me without gloves, didn't he?" said Joe, with a grin.

"Well, he said if you were his son he'd soon show you your place."

"Oh, he did? Well, he ought to practice a little bit on Herbert before he goes around handing out gratuitous advice to other parents. Herbert needs it."

"He was very much annoyed, at any rate. He said he didn't know whether he should bother any more about the matter or not."

"That was only a bluff, mother."

"By the way, Katie Todd called this morning, early, before she went to work."

"Did she?" said Joe, with some interest. "What did she want? I haven't been able to see Katie for quite awhile."

"She said she wanted to see you very much. Seemed to be quite anxious over something. She left a note for you, which she asked me to be sure and see that you got as soon as possible."

"Where is it, mother?"

"On the mantel in the dining-room."

Joe walked into that room and got it.

"I wonder what she has to say to me?" mused the boy, as he tore the envelope open.

It was written on a scrap of manila paper with a lead pencil, and was hurriedly scrawled.

It ran as follows:

"DEAR JOE—I want to warn you against that engineer with whom you had some trouble—Abel Hyde. He's up to some scheme to injure you, and I'm sorry to say father is helping him. I couldn't find out what it is, but I fear it is something serious. Father has been drunk almost continuously since the evening he met us on the street, and we have all had a hard time of it. ('Poor Katie,' murmured Joe). I heard father mention the name of Mr. Chase, the president of the railroad, several times, almost in the same breath that he talked about you and Abel Hyde. I can't imagine what he could mean by that, and I merely mention the circumstance because it seems so queer to me. Please be on your guard against both my father and Abel Hyde. It would make me feel very badly indeed if you came to harm, especially through my father, who, bad as he is, is still my father.

"KATIE TODD."

"There seems to be something doing," muttered Joe, as he refolded the note and put it in his pocket, "but this note doesn't throw any great light upon it."

Joe ate his dinner and then went up to his room for a sleep, of which he felt greatly in need, for he hadn't closed his eyes since the previous day at Trinidad.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he woke up, and he decided, as the night was fine, he would go out and take a short walk, for he wanted to see one of his friends on a little matter of business.

"I'll be back in an hour, mother," he said, as he put on his hat.

"Very well," she answered. "I'll wait up for you, as I sha'n't care to get to bed before ten."

The evening was warm, for it was the first part of July.

There was no moon, and as the sky was overcast, the streets in that locality, not any too well lighted, were rather dark and, at that hour, somewhat lonesome.

Joe started up the street at a swinging stride, habitual with him and consequently did not observe the crouching figure of a man who, a few minutes before, had slouched up against the fence which enclosed the neat little garden in front of his mother's cottage.

The figure straightened up as Joe walked off, and stealthily followed in his wake.

At the corner he was joined by another person, and both sneaked along at the pace set by the boy, but kept as close as possible in the shadow of the houses.

Joe turned down an adjacent street and his shadowers did likewise.

Then he crossed over and continued along on the other side of a block and turned up a shady street.

The fellows behind crossed at the corner and now rapidly closed in on him.

Half way up the block, and within two doors of his destination, his sharp ears detected the stealthy steps behind, and he turned and looked back.

He saw the indistinct forms of the two men coming quickly on.

Supposing, naturally, they were men going home, he made no effort to avoid them.

In a moment or two they were up to him.

Suddenly something soft and clinging was thrown over his head and he was pinned down to the walk, without the power to utter a cry for help.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH KATIE TODD SHOWS WHAT SHE IS MADE OF.

Of course Joe, as soon as he realized what was happening to him, put up a hard struggle to free himself from the folds of the material which enveloped his head and shoulders, but both of the men plumped themselves down on him and pinioned his arms to his side in such a way that he soon found himself quite helpless.

Then the air within the shawl was soon exhausted, and a sufficient quantity of fresh air not being obtainable, the boy quickly collapsed and lay quite still, whereupon the brace of ruffians, not meaning to do him up entirely there

on the street, cautiously removed the covering from his head and permitted the atmosphere to circulate in his lungs again.

They were satisfied that they had accomplished their object, which was to render him insensible, so that they might be able to carry out the rest of the programme without opposition on the boy's part.

"He's quiet enough now," said the voice of Abel Hyde. "Pick him up by the heels and we'll carry him to the house."

The individual who had been requested to lift Joe's nether limbs would easily have been recognized as Michael Todd by any one who knew him.

Hyde took hold of the boy under his armpits, and thus the two men carried the young engineer along the shady and deserted street for several blocks without meeting a soul, not even a policeman, and Pandora was reputed to be fairly well picketed by the guardians of the peace.

Finally they turned a corner, which brought them down by the railroad track.

Alongside of the track they walked for some little distance until they came to a solitary, lonesome-looking two-story dwelling, much in need of paint and repair, and which seemed to be uninhabited.

Hyde and his companion laid the boy down, and the former produced a key from his pocket and opened the front door.

Then they raised the unconscious boy between them, entered the building and shut and locked the door behind them.

Hardly had they disappeared with their prisoner before another figure came out of the gloom from the direction the men and their burden had come.

It was a small figure, and it wore skirts and a hat not adapted to a man or a boy—therefore its sex could not be misunderstood.

It was a girl, and a very determined little one at that, who, had she been asked by one entitled to an answer, would have said that her name was Katie Todd.

Half an hour before Katie had been looking out of her unlit chamber window, which commanded a view of the Vickers cottage, diagonally across the street, when she saw two men, whom she identified as her father and Abel Hyde, come up the road.

They separated in front of the house, one going on to the corner, while the other, Hyde, crossed over toward the Vickers house.

At that moment Joe came out, and she saw the two men follow him stealthily behind.

That was enough for Katie.

She knew they were up to some mischief directed at Joe Vickers, and she at once decided, like the brave little girl she was, that she would track the shadowers and try to get a chance to warn the boy.

So she put on her hat and started forth into the night, undismayed by the lonesomeness of the streets and the silence which reigned abroad at that hour.

But she failed in her effort to intercept Joe, and almost

betrayed her presence by a scream when he was set upon and overpowered.

When Hyde and Todd started to carry Joe away, Katie followed as silent and alert as an Indian on a trail, and she had now spotted the place which appeared to be the destination of the two men.

Taking note of the building and its surroundings, Katie started off toward the distant railroad yard to get help to release Joe from his predicament.

In the meantime, Hyde and his companion carried Joe upstairs to a rudely furnished room, and threw him on the bed.

"It's about time he come to, ain't it?" said Michael Todd, looking down at the pale face of the still, inanimate lad, after his companion had lit a candle.

"He'll come around presently, don't you fear," said Abel Hyde, drawing a short, black pipe from one pocket and a portion of a paper of smoking tobacco from another.

Drawing a chair up near the door, which he closed, Hyde coolly filled his pipe, struck a match and, applying the light to the bowl, began to smoke.

"Anythin' to drink on the premises?" asked Todd, in an eager voice.

Hyde nodded his head toward the bureau, which stood near the window.

Todd took the hint, opened the top drawer and swooped down upon a pint bottle of old rye, in which several good-sized drinks still remained.

After the section foreman had withdrawn the bottle from his lips there was a noticeable shrinkage of its contents.

The gurgle of the liquor awakened a kindred desire on Hyde's part to sample the whiskey also, and as soon as the bottle came into his hands he drank down the remainder and tossed the bottle upon the floor behind him.

"That's where my money goes," he remarked, with a satisfied grin.

"Mine, too," said Todd.

"But this night's work ought to point the way to many more of them bottles," quoth Hyde, complacently.

"That's what it ought," agreed his associate.

A movement from the bed attracted Hyde's notice.

"He's coming to his senses," the engineer remarked. "You'd better go downstairs and keep an eye out for the trackwalker. As soon as he passes down, come up."

Michael nodded and left the room.

He went downstairs to one of the lower rooms, overlooking the track, and seated himself on a box by the window.

The silence and the last dose of whiskey produced a somnolent effect upon him, and the result was his head soon fell upon his breast and he snored away to beat the band.

Upstairs, Hyde watched Joe Vickers gradually come to consciousness.

"Where am I?" muttered the boy, aloud, as he sat up in stupefied astonishment at his unusual surroundings.

"Where I've been waiting to get you," said Hyde, and then Joe realized that he was not alone, but face to face with his enemy, the vindictive engineer.

The boy felt he was in for it, but he didn't lose courage.

"Why did you bring me here?" he asked, firmly.

"To have a talk with you where there is no likelihood of interruption," replied the engineer, showing his teeth unpleasantly.

"I suppose I've got to listen to you."

"I reckon you have, so we'll proceed to business. There's a little account to be settled between you and me, if you remember. I'm willing to let that go if you're disposed to be reasonable in the matter, which I am authorized to arrange with you. If you turn balky, why, all I've got to say is, there'll be a freight along here in half an hour and you'll be tied to the track out yonder in a way that'll allow the wheels to make mincemeat of you."

"What do you want of me?" asked Joe, with a shudder at the significant reference to the expected freight train.

Abel Hyde rose, went to a big table at one side of the room, and pulling out a drawer took therefrom a small book and a pad of writing-paper, together with a penholder and a bottle of ink.

From his pocket he produced a folded legal document.

"Write a note to your mother, telling her to sign this deed, which conveys a certain piece of property to Mr. Godfrey Chase, president of the N. & P. Tell her that business prevents your return to-night, and that she can take Mr. Chase's check to the bank to-morrow and have it cashed. After you have done that you must take your solemn oath on this here Bible never to open your mouth about what has occurred here to-night, nor to make any fuss about the transfer of the property in question. If you agree to do this you'll be set free to-morrow morning in time to report for work at the yard. If you refuse, the freight will get you. I'll give you five minutes to make up your mind."

"You must think I am a fool to agree to any such scheme as you propose. Mr. Chase has only defeated himself by employing such a tool as yourself to gain his ends," said Joe, stoutly.

Abel Hyde laughed sardonically.

"You certainly are a greater fool than I took you to be, Joe Vickers. You must either do what I want or die a horrible death. If it must be the latter, your mother will gladly sign away that property in order to get money enough to bury what will be found of your remains and to save her cottage from ultimate foreclosure of the mortgage Mr. Chase holds upon it."

"You are a scoundrel, Abel Hyde!" cried Joe, rising to his feet.

"Hard words break no bones," grinned the engineer.

"Then I'll see whether this will make any impression on them!" cried Joe, rushing over and grabbing the chair, which he swung aloft with the evident intention of striking down the rascal.

But Hyde was equal to the occasion.

He jumped aside and evaded the descending chair, which slipped away from the lad's grasp.

Then, with an oath, the engineer sprang upon Joe and bore him to the floor.

The boy was strong as a young lion, and he knew the

situation was desperate, so he fought for his life, with every ounce of power he could bring to bear.

Hyde, however, was a man of iron muscle and dogged resolution, and proved to be more than his match.

Over and over they rolled about the floor of the room, now one on top, then the other—each seeking to master the other.

The table was overturned, the candlestick falling to the floor.

The struggle soon had its effect on Joe, and with a feeling of despair he felt himself growing weaker and weaker.

Finally Hyde got him down and held him down.

The talon-like fingers of the schemer closed about Joe's neck, and were fast choking the life out of the boy, when the door was suddenly burst open and Dan Beard, closely followed by Katie Todd, dashed into the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABEL HYDE IS HELD FOR TRIAL.

Dan Beard sized up the situation.

He didn't lose a moment in grasping Abel Hyde by the shoulders and yanking him off the prostrate boy.

Joe's big friend had the advantage of size and strength, and being very much in earnest, he made short work of Hyde.

He threw the man on the bed and sat on him.

Katie rushed to Joe and assisted him to rise.

She had expected to find her father in the room also, and was thankful he was not, as his absence simplified matters greatly.

"That was a narrow shave I had," said the boy, rubbing his throat where he still could feel the unpleasant sensation caused by Hyde's vise-like grip. "How came you here, Katie? You and Dan?"

"I can't tell you yet. Mr. Beard is calling you."

"Come here, Joe. I want you to tie this rascal while I hold him!" cried Dan.

Joe was only too willing to take a hand in putting his late antagonist in a shape where he couldn't do any more harm.

Abel Hyde didn't take his defeat calmly, as may be supposed.

He squirmed and kicked, and swore like a trooper, while Joe tore one of the dirty bed sheets into strips and tied his arms and legs.

Finally he was reduced to a helpless state.

"This isn't the end of this matter by a long shot," he gritted, fiercely, regarding the boy with a malignant scowl. "I'll get square with you yet if it takes me months or years to reach you."

"Shut up, you cantankerous scoundrel!" exclaimed Beard, with some warmth. "You'll harm nobody for some time to come, I'm thinking. Where's your companion?"

"Find out!" growled Hyde.

Beard and Katie had been accompanied by another man, a stout teamster with whom Dan had been talking down by the corner of the railroad yard when Katie, in search of assistance, fortunately ran against them.

He had remained standing in the background, as his aid did not seem to be required.

Now he came forward and said:

"I heard somebody moving about downstairs just now. Perhaps it is the man you want."

Beard agreed that it would be well to investigate, so he and the teamster left the room.

"Now, Katie," said Joe, regarding the pretty factory girl with a look of great interest, "I want to hear how you and Dan discovered I had been brought here."

"It was just luck," she said, earnestly, "and I am so glad we got here in time to save you."

Then she told Joe how she had seen the two men, one of whom was her father, from the window; how she had followed in their wake intent on warning him of his danger, and how, when this proved futile, she had gone in search of help, and been so fortunate as to find Dan Beard and a companion a few blocks away.

She knew Beard by sight, and when she had hurriedly told her story, Dan and his friend accompanied her back to the building into which she had seen Joe carried.

They had effected an entrance through a rear window, which they had found unsecured, and the noise of the struggle upstairs had guided them to the right spot.

"There, that's all," concluded the girl, with a note of excitement in her tones.

"Do you know, I believe you have saved my life to-night, Katie," said Joe, with a look of mingled gratitude and admiration in his eyes, while he held her two brown little hands in his. "Hyde swore he meant to tie me down to the track outside and let the incoming freight carve me up if I refused to do what he wanted."

"Oh!" shuddered the girl. "And did my father agree to that awful——"

Her eyes filled with tears of grief and shame.

Joe pitied her.

"That is a question which must remain unanswered, Katie," he said.

"You wish to spare me the humiliation of knowing that my father was in thought at least a——"

Joe knew the dreadful word which fluttered on her trembling tongue, and he caught her in his arms as she uttered a pathetic little cry, almost of despair.

Her head dropped on his shoulder, and she sobbed for a few moments as if her heart would break.

Joe comforted her as best he knew how.

"I will make it as easy as possible for your father if he is arrested," he said, earnestly.

Katie looked up at him gratefully.

"I know you mean it," she replied, "but the dreadful story will have to be told. My own statement will be enough to convict my father of being an accomplice of a crime."

Dan Beard and his friend, the teamster, now returned, after an unsuccessful search for Michael Todd.

The man had evidently taken alarm and fled.

A heavy rumble and the strident puffing of a locomotive announced the approach of the freight.

The cars slowly rolled by the old house, causing the building to tremble down to its foundations.

"Well," said Dan, "we may as well get out of here. Come, now!" cutting the bonds which had secured Hyde's legs, "get on to your feet. We're going to march you up to jail."

Abel Hyde sullenly obeyed, for resistance was of no avail.

Twenty minutes later Joe made his charge against the scoundrelly engineer, and the fellow was locked up, pending his examination in the police court in the morning.

Then the party separated, Joe seeing Katie home.

It was after midnight when the boy knocked for admission at his home.

"Why, Joe, I did not think you meant to stay out until this hour," said his mother, whose face wore an anxious look.

"Nor did I, mother. Come into the dining-room and I will tell you what detained me."

Joe knew that he had to tell his story, though he hated to upset his mother.

So he explained his adventure as gently as he could.

Of course the story was a shock to Mrs. Vickers—how could it be otherwise?

You know how it is with mothers.

Her gratitude to Katie Todd was boundless.

"And now, mother, you see what kind of man Godfrey Chase is. He will stoop pretty low to accomplish his purpose. You don't want any better proof that the property he wants to recover must have turned up valuable in some way. We shall surely get at the real truth as soon as Judge Van Slyck has had time to go into it."

Joe was slated to go out with a train of empties next morning at nine, but owing to the fact that it was necessary for him to appear at the police court, he was excused from duty until the afternoon, although it was clear the master mechanic did not relish the delay.

At the examination, Joe suppressed all reference to Mr. Chase's presumed connection with the affair.

Dan Beard's evidence was submitted in the form of a deposition, sworn to before a notary, as the engineer was compelled to take out the 8.55 express.

His friend, the teamster, corroborated the written testimony in the witness-chair.

Katie went bravely through her trying ordeal, and the result of it all was that Abel Hyde was held for trial at the next term of the criminal court.

Several officers were sent out to find Michael Todd, who was believed to be hiding somewhere in town, but when Joe got home that night he had not been found.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH JOE HAS A RUN-IN WITH HERBERT CHASE.

Three months passed away.

Joe Vickers had made good at the thrötle, and his advancement was made permanent.

During that time Abel Hyde was tried and convicted for his assault on Joe, and got a two-years' sentence in the State prison.

Michael Todd had managed to evade capture and was still at large.

We may as well say here that he was never heard of again.

Katie, her mother and the two little Todds found his absence from the family rooftree a great relief.

Joe called on the Van Slycks once.

His purpose was to find out what news, if any, the judge had for him in reference to his "gold brick" property, as he called it.

The reason why he had not heard from Judge Van Slyck was then apparent.

The judge had gone to Washington to attend to an important legal matter, to which the Nimrod & Pandora R. R. was a party, and which had come up before the Supreme Court of the United States.

His family could not say when he might be expected back.

Joe was disappointed, but there wasn't anything for him to do but make the best of it.

Godfrey Chase did not call again at the Vickers' cottage, but he wrote a letter to Joe's mother, stating that whenever she was ready to transfer the land he would be pleased to see her at his office, where the matter could be settled.

One morning when Joe came into the yard, expecting to take a train of empty coal cars down to the Silver Bow Branch, Gosport met him and said that Mr. Ditchett wanted to see him at his office.

Joe proceeded without delay to the office of the master mechanic.

"Vickers," began Mr. Ditchett, swinging about in his chair and facing the boy, "I've had my eye on you ever since you were advanced to your present position on the road, and I am pleased to find that you have made an excellent record."

Joe bowed.

"Therefore," went on Mr. Ditchett, "I am going to give you something better than hauling coal cars and yard work. How would you like to run a passenger?"

For a moment Joe was speechless from surprise, then he answered as calmly as he could:

"I should like it very much, sir."

"I presume you are ready to go out this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I shall put you on No. 31. You can take Oliver to fire for you."

"I should like to have him. We are used to each other."

"All right. You are to take the 9.55 accommodation on the Nimrod division. Report to the trainmaster and take your orders from him. Good-day."

Joe felt as if he was walking on air when he left the master mechanic's office.

It was a promotion he had not dared dream of.

He had been advanced over the heads of many old engineers who had been years in the company's employ.

So it was with a proud step that he went to the office of the trainmaster.

That official gave Joe his directions in a very few words, and then the boy made his way at once to the roundhouse, where he found Dick Oliver, the young fellow who had

fired for him ever since he first took charge of a locomotive, getting 31 in shape for her run to Grand Junction.

Joe wrote a note to his mother notifying her of the change in his work, and that he would not be back to Pandora until late that night.

He sent it to the cottage by a special messenger, and then it was time for him to run out of the roundhouse and back down to the train-shed.

Promptly on time, the through accommodation pulled out, and was switched on to the Nimrod main line.

"I'm glad you've been promoted, Vickers," said Oliver, for the second time that morning, after the train had reached her schedule gait, "and that you managed to bring me with you. I'd much rather fire a decent engine like this than the old hookers we've been up against of late. I notice the coal is good, for a wonder. That makes it easier for a fellow than when it's half mixed with slate, as I have seen it sometimes. Then Old Nick himself might shovel the furnace full till his back ached and he couldn't keep the gauge from falling."

"That's no lie, Dick, though I didn't fire long enough to run up against such hard luck."

"This is a fine level country we're traveling over. I've been told there's no grades to speak of on this division."

"So I understand. There's a long tunnel through the Round Top range, between here and Nimrod, and a steel-girder bridge across the Lamar River, twenty miles or so this side of Grand Junction."

It was a fine day, and Joe was feeling like a top.

Everything went well with 31.

During the entire trip to Grand Junction the indicator on the steam gauge did not vary to any great extent.

It showed a strong and steady pressure that fully satisfied Joe.

Therefore, he made all his stops on schedule time without the least difficulty, and finally arrived at Grand Junction on time to the minute.

At five o'clock he pulled out on his return trip to Pandora.

An hour later the south-bound accommodation arrived at Nimrod.

Here the conductor received orders to pick up the directors' car, which was standing on the siding at a small station named Sidney, on the edge of the prairie, ten miles or so south of the long tunnel, and he notified Joe to that effect.

While Joe was oiling the drivers and Dick Oliver was looking after the fire, a well-dressed youth walked down the platform and attempted to mount up into the cab.

Joe saw him and quickly headed him off.

When he got close to him he saw it was Herbert Chase.

"You can't get up there," he said to the son of the railroad magnate.

"Why can't I?" retorted Herbert, with a frown.

"It's against the regulations of the road, that is, unless you have a permit from the superintendent or the master mechanic."

"My father is one of the owners of this road, and I guess

I can go where I choose," replied Herbert, insolently. "I'd like to know how you come to be driving a passenger train, anyway, Joe Vickers? I thought you was a fireman on the freight. Father will have to hear of this, and then I guess there'll be something doing."

He made another attempt to mount the iron steps, but Joe, with as little show of force as was possible, prevented him.

"What do you mean by putting your greasy hands on my clothes, you beggar?" cried Herbert, furiously.

"I haven't soiled your clothes," replied Joe. "If you're going to Pandora by this train you'd better get back to the coaches, for I expect to get the signal to go ahead any moment."

"I want you to understand that I'm going to ride to Pandora on this engine," persisted Herbert, with an air of importance.

"Have you a signed permit from the proper authority?" asked Joe.

"No, I haven't, but my father and several of the directors of the road are at Sidney, so I don't think you'll dare keep me off."

"That doesn't make the least bit of difference. You can't ride without a permit and that's all there is to it," said Joe, firmly. "Step back, please."

Herbert fumed and sputtered, but the young engineer paid no further attention to him.

He swung up into the cab and in a moment or two the conductor gave him the signal to start.

As the driving-wheels began slowly to revolve, Herbert shook his fist at Joe in impotent rage, and then, fully determined to have the young engineer discharged, he ran back and sprang aboard the first coach.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RACE FOR LIFE—CONCLUSION.

"That was President Chase's son, wasn't it?" asked Dick Oliver, as the train gathered headway.

"That's who it was," replied Joe.

"He's got a lot of nerve, all right. He ought to know the regulations of the road as well as anybody."

"Herbert would like to have the regulations altered to suit his convenience," returned the young engineer, who had Master Chase down pretty fine.

"I'll bet he'll try to make trouble for you."

"It won't be the first time he's tried to make things hot for me; but, all the same, he hasn't succeeded. He has hated me ever since the day old 13 smashed up his father's automobile and I saved Florence Van Slyck, who was riding with him at the time. She hasn't noticed him since, and he blames me for it."

It was a nine-mile run to the north end of the long tunnel, but it was dark when they reached that point, though the sky had a strange glow above the top of the range.

"Something's wrong!" cried Oliver, with his head out of the cab window, "there is the danger signal displayed on the semaphore."

Joe's sharp eyes had already made out the bright red

light hanging fifteen feet or more in the air, in front of the telegraph block house.

He blew the whistle, reversed and put on the air brakes, bringing the train to a full stop near the entrance to the tunnel.

The conductor alighted from the baggage car, and Joe saw the telegraph operator meet him outside of the door of his building and hand him a paper, which he read by the light of his lantern.

"I wonder what's up?" said Oliver, in an interested tone.

"Give it up," replied Joe, "but we're likely to know in a moment, for here comes the conductor."

"Vickers," said the mogul of the train as soon as he reached the locomotive, "we have orders, you know, to pick up the directors' car at Sidney."

The young engineer nodded.

"Well, it appears the prairie is afire all around Sidney, and is spreading to the tracks. President Chase and half a dozen of the directors are aboard of the car, and have telegraphed for help. They can't be reached from the south, as a section of the track has been destroyed between Sidney and Overland, where the night express has been held up. Uncouple your engine and tender and pull through to Sidney and fetch the car away."

"All right, sir. We'll get there if the track is all right."

"Make haste; there isn't a moment to be lost."

Joe and his fireman leaped from the cab, and each tackled one of the air brake connections and disconnected them.

Then the automatic coupler was detached, and the chains underneath unhitched.

While the boys were thus engaged the operator ran over with another dispatch he had just received from Sidney.

"I telegraphed to Sidney that I have held up the five o'clock accommodation from Grand Junction, and would send the locomotive forward to bring them out. There are a dozen persons, mostly employes of the road, there in addition to the president and directors. The operator there now tells me the wires are down south of them and that the fire is fast approaching the station. He says it may reach them in less than twenty minutes, and their only chance is for the locomotive to get there within that time."

"You hear that, Vickers? You haven't over twelve or fifteen minutes to pass through the tunnel and then cover the ten or eleven miles of prairie beyond. A matter of twenty lives depends on your speed, so drive her for all she's worth."

"I'm ready now. Come on, Dick!"

Joe opened her up by degrees, and 31 was soon flying through the long, dark tunnel, out of the other end of which she soon darted, like a swaying meteor.

And now the whole sky on this side of the range was lighted by a fearful conflagration.

The distant horizon looked like the edge of an ocean of fire.

Even at that distance great tongues of flame could be seen reaching out toward the far-off tracks.

Indeed, it looked to Joe and his companions as if the fire had actually reached the line of rails.

"We'll never be able to fetch Sidney!" cried Oliver, huskily. "I'll wager we'll find the track afire miles this side of the station."

"We must reach there," said Joe, firmly, as he hooked her up another notch, while his assistant shoveled the coal into the furnace as fast as he could work.

The drivers of 31 were now flashing up and down at a lightning rate, while engine and tender swayed like a heavy-laden barge in a cross sea.

Joe reckoned they were making 70 miles an hour.

At this rate they would reach Sidney in less than ten minutes if the line was passable.

Every moment the fire grew brighter and seemed nearer to the track.

They could feel the breath of the conflagration on their cheeks, although the flames were still miles away.

The fire was spreading with great rapidity, and was coming toward them.

Joe, with his hand on the throttle, and his body half out of the cab window, gazed down the line, fascinated by the murderous glare which appeared to be consuming both the earth and sky.

The furnace door was kept open to create as much draught as possible, and within the fire roared like a vision of the infernal regions.

The perspiration was pouring down Oliver's face, and the only rest he took was to bathe his forehead with water from the tank occasionally.

And now they were drawing near Sidney.

Joe could see the dark outline of the station silhouetted against the fiery background.

He let off a long, shrill whistle to let the beleaguered ones know help was almost at hand.

They were now within a mile of their destination, and the heat was something terrific.

Joe began to ease 31 up by degrees, but for the next half mile her speed hardly appeared to diminish, owing to the momentum she had acquired.

But he got her under control by the time she hit the last stretch, and he whistled again.

The roof of the station was smoking and some of the telegraph poles were on fire when he slowed down and approached the siding.

The switch was over and everything ready for him to bring the engine up against the solitary car lying there on the side track.

Something like a cheer greeted his arrival, and ready hands were soon busy coupling on 31.

Just as the signal was given—"All right, go ahead!"—a blazing telegraph pole fell over upon the car and crushed in the roof like an egg shell.

As Joe pulled on the throttle, the car began to blaze, but a score of hands soon smothered the fire, and engine and car commenced their race against the conflagration rushing down to devour them.

The return trip was far more perilous than the other, for the flames, racing along at an incredible speed, succeeded in reaching the track in many spots ahead of them.

At such places the blazing telegraph poles threatened to topple over on to the rails, before 31 and her trailing coach could pass, and such a catastrophe could only mean one thing—instant destruction to all.

Joe could see the ties smoking and even burning in spots.

The car behind was also smoking from the intense heat, and there was every danger that it might catch into a blaze at any moment, which, with the draught formed by a mile-a-minute run, meant extinction in a brief time.

Oliver suffered fearfully as he fed the furnace.

His eyes bulged, and his tongue lolled out of his mouth.

Joe, who felt as if the breath of the infernal regions was consuming him, glanced pityingly at his assistant, fearing that he would collapse any moment.

The roar of that fearful fire, as it came swooping down after them, was like a great storm at sea—strident and terrible.

But now they were drawing away from its outer edge, with the driving rods of 31 marking a pace of 60 miles an hour.

The mountain range was looming up ahead, with the black mouth of the tunnel before them.

Two minutes more they would be there, and now that they were comparatively safe, Joe shut off steam, allowing the locomotive to proceed by her acquired velocity alone, while Oliver dropped, fainting and exhausted, down on the bottom of the tender amid the scattered chunks of coal.

The race for life had been won, but the strain of it all had been terrible.

Five minutes later engine and car rolled out of the north end of the tunnel and came to a stop near the cars of the accommodation train.

Although Joe had heroically saved the twenty imperilled people who had been cut off at Sidney, it was found on their arrival that death was hovering over the directors' car.

The blazing telegraph pole which had smashed in the roof of the car just before they started north had struck Godfrey Chase and fatally injured him.

He was dying, and he knew it.

"Let me shake the hand of the brave engineer who brought us through this sea of fire," he whispered to those around him, and Joe Vickers was brought into the car.

The dying magnate was face to face with the son of the man he had wronged in days gone by, and as he recognized Joe a spasm of remorse swept over his features.

He waved the others away, and all withdrew but the boy.

"I wronged your father, lad, as you know, and I have tried to cheat you, too, out of great wealth. The property I strove to regain from your mother, and which she told me now belongs, by right of purchase, to you, is of inestimable value by reason of its vast growth of locust trees, invaluable to this and other railroads for ties and telegraph poles, on account of their toughness and durability. There are, I have computed, half a million dollars' worth of lumber there as it stands. You are rich, boy. All I ask now is that you forgive me for the past."

"I do forgive you, sir, with all my heart, for I believe you are sincerely sorry for the wrong you did us."

Joe ran the train back to Nimrod, and when she reached there Godfrey Chase was dead.

As a matter of course, the young engineer's thrilling rescue of the twenty lives, five of them directors of the company, from the doomed station at Sidney, created intense excitement at Nimrod, and the feat was telegraphed all over the country.

Joe naturally became the hero of the hour, but that fact didn't give him a big head.

The result of it all was that the directors held a special meeting during the week at Pandora and voted the brave boy and his fireman \$10,000 as evidence of their appreciation.

His skill as an engineer was so highly regarded that when an opening occurred, a few weeks later, he was promoted to the night express on the Nimrod division.

About this time Judge Van Slyck's investigations in his behalf confirmed the late Mr. Chase's statement concerning his property.

There were enough full-grown locust trees on the land to furnish, at a rough guess, 100,000 telegraph poles, worth \$4 each, which meant \$400,000, sufficient to provide their young owner with an income of \$20,000 a year.

Joe's automatic coupler invention also proved a winner, and the firm of Fosdick & Vickers realize a large annual income from the royalties.

Joe, however, stuck to the railroad, and in a few years rose to the coveted position of superintendent, and subsequently he became general manager.

Eventually he bought out all of the stock owned by the Chase estate, and was, at the next election thereafter, elected to the presidency of the N. & P. R. R.

That occurred when he had reached the age of 25, but some years before that he was married to Florence Van Slyck.

He is one of the best-known railroad men in the West to-day, but for obvious reasons we did not use his right name.

And there is no doubt that he reached his high station in life because he was ambitious and industrious—A Boy Who Could Not be Downed.

THE END.

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